

# Virtually Real: Being In Cyberspace

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

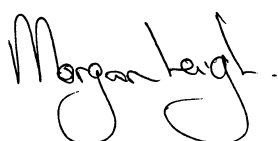
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## Acknowledgements

This thesis would never have been started, let alone come to fruition, without the endless supply of hardware, support, debates, encouragement, arguments, sheer programming brilliance and the inconceivably amazing attention to detail I was fortunate to be the beneficiary of from my partner, Tim Serong. It is to him that I dedicate this thesis.

I am indebted to the members of the communities I studied for agreeing to take part in this project. I owe especial thanks to the Pharaoh for his permission to undertake this research in his sims, to the oracle for constantly keeping me up to date with the latest gossip, and to the tailor for his mediating skills.

I first found out about Second Life from Dr. Helen Farley when I was at the University of Queensland. Her guidance when I was first coming to know the world assisted me with my first steps into that virtual domain, and I thank her for it. I am obliged to Associate Professor Douglas Ezzy for agreeing to take over the supervision of this thesis when I moved to Tasmania. Thanks to Dr. Max Travers for his help as my associate supervisor. I also greatly appreciate the assistance provided by Denise Jones in the school office.



## Abstract

This thesis is an autoethnographic account of my search for the sacred in cyberspace. The research was conducted in the virtual world Second Life, and in particular in two role play communities set in Ancient Egypt. Virtual worlds are often criticised as unreal, as just games. Here I explore the ontological status of virtual worlds, recognising the priority for their inhabitants of lived experience over purely rational assessments. This research is unique and important as no monograph of role play communities in Second Life has yet been published, and yet tens of millions of people spend an increasing amount of time in virtual and game worlds, often preferring them to the meatspace world. I recount my experiences with ritual in cyberspace, describing sacred virtual space, and its relationship to sacred meatspace from a Pagan perspective. I compare two initiation rituals, and describe how one produced the perception of sacred space, in both meatspace and the virtual world, while the other remained only a role play. Finally I analyse an opening of the mouth ritual to reveal the way we make sense of our own realities by building on and remixing what came before us, and to argue that there are many truths and that objectivity is impossible in the human condition. This is the story of how I became one with my avatar, despite my best efforts not to do so.

Themes of the fun economy, remix culture, and copyright inform the analysis in the thesis. I explore Castronova's concept of the fun economy, the amalgam of work, play and education which characterises twenty first century life in the developed world. Freedom and fun are the motivators for the inhabitants of virtual worlds and the bounds of these are defined by copyright. This issue is examined through the lens of the Second Life permissions system and the work of Lessig and his concept of remix culture. I argue that remix culture has permeated the entirety of human history, giving examples from ancient Egypt through to the present day, and consider the implications for human culture if restrictive copyright laws continue to dominate legal frameworks, despite their failure to achieve their desired ends. Exploring our future in cyberspace through Kurzweil's concept of the singularity, I consider the possibilities of his predicted combination of the worlds of meatspace and the virtual.

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# 1. Introduction

I am writing this thesis in the first person. It is an autoethnography, the story of what became of me in Second Life, how I entered that world and was changed by it. I have to tell this in the first person as the only thing I can be sure of is what happened to me. I know what others told me about themselves, but that is not the same as knowing what happened to them. Many other humans and avatars intersected my journey. We shared space and place and time. We told each other stuff and shared experiences, but, as is likewise the case in the physical world, in cyberspace one never really knows the other. In Second Life one can not even know for sure the name of the human behind the avatar, even if they tell you. What they say may or may not be a complete fabrication. I can tell you what they told me, but that has just become hearsay. So I prefer to tell you about what happened to me, because I know that is real. I can speak to you about them, but not for them. Even when their own voices speak they are filtered through the lens of what Leary calls a reality tunnel<sup>1</sup>. We each live in our own perceptual universe, no two sensoria are exactly alike, but, because we all live in the same physical universe, we imagine it is a shared whole, its entirety common to us all. But our perceptual worlds are as unique as we each are, each unique perceptual world adding to the creation of the whole of reality. This thesis is my own contribution to the creation of that reality in the spirit of the Jain concept of Anekantavada<sup>2</sup> - the multiplicity of viewpoints that make up truth and reality.

Each of these perceptual worlds, not just our sensoria, but the perceptions and understandings we develop as the result of the accumulation of our life's experiences, comprise our own unique reality tunnel. We usually only notice the differences when our tunnels don't intersect, when we suddenly discover that someone we think we know acts unexpectedly. Because I am not living in the same reality tunnel as any of the inhabitants of the communities I studied, I choose not to speak for them. I will tell you what they told me, and use that as a basis to frame my understanding of what their motivations and plans might have been. But please bear in mind when I do this that it is my perceptions of such motivations and plans, which, it is entirely possible, and indeed highly likely, are distinctly different to those intended by the people I was engaging with. This thesis is about my perceptions and the understandings I came to as a result of them. Even by the act of selecting which stories to tell you I am editing, re-framing, refocusing, and readjusting their words by removing them from the context in which they were spoken. It is not my intention to uncover The Truth, if such a thing even exists, about what went on in these communities. Rather I am here to tell you my story. The story of my lives in virtual worlds.

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1 Leary, T. F., (2006), *Neuropolitique*, New Falcon Publications, Arizona, p. 93.

2 Sethia, T. (ed), (2004), *Ahimsa, Anekanta, and Jainism*, Motilal Banarsidass Publications, Delhi.

My theological framework is then an important part of my perspective. I am primarily a theologian and secondarily a sociologist. So this is not going to be a typical sociological thesis. I was raised a Catholic in a very Catholic family and was always interested in and connected to religion in a very visceral way, from quite an early age, but Catholicism never sat well with me. I found monotheism restricting as a theological framework, and honestly quite worrying, as a monotheistic conceptual world is contingent on the creation of an other that is rejected and excluded. I wanted to embrace and include. This, and my inability to conceive humans as non divine creations of a separate divine progenitor, but rather as divine beings who were a part of a panentheistic universe, soon led me to a theological understanding which is today generally labeled Pagan. Mine is a diverse Paganism. I do not belong to any particular tradition in the Pagan sphere, but see them all as expressions of the underlying panentheistic nature of being. An important difference between this study of Paganism and magic and some others is that the journey I was taking was of non resident to resident, not from non Pagan to Pagan. Unlike Stoller and Olkes<sup>3</sup> and Luhrmann<sup>4</sup> I was already quite firmly a Pagan before I began this work.

Because of my panentheistic conceptions of being you will see me employ conceptions from diverse traditions in order to explain my understandings of being 'in the world', which is how residents of Second Life refer to being immersed in their virtual domain. Henceforth when I use this phrase it refers to the world inside Second Life. To refer to the physically manifest world we humans normally reside in I will use 'meatspace', a term with a long history in internet culture<sup>5</sup> and which is used by some residents of Second Life<sup>6</sup> to refer to the physical world in which our consciousnesses inhabit meat bodies. Most residents of Second Life use 'RL', for real life. My resentment of the implication that the ontological status of virtual worlds was somehow inferior to that of the physical world caused me to reject that term. I preferred 'meatspace'. My experiences in the world ultimately revealed to me the relevance of meatspace as a descriptor. For virtual worlds disintermediate physical pain. The avatar has no meat, so it has no physical pain. The meatspace world is controlled by the application, or the fear of, pain. Both physical and emotional. Only one of these is possible in the virtual world. In virtual worlds we can be the people we could be if we never had to fear physical pain. We enter the world and create ourselves anew. This is not to say that avatars cannot be harmed. People are deeply affected when their avatars are perceived to have been harmed<sup>7</sup>.

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- 3 Stoller, P., Olkes, C., (1987), *In Sorcery's Shadow*, University Of Chicago Press, Chicago.
  - 4 Luhrmann, T. M., (1989), *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Harvard University Press.
  - 5 Ask MetaFilter, *Origin of the term meatspace?*, <http://ask.metafilter.com/15851/Origin-of-the-term-meatspace>, Accessed 02/04/2014.
  - 6 Dodero, C., (2006), *Does your life suck?*, <http://thephoenix.com/Boston/life/17440-does-your-life-suck/>, Accessed 02/04/2014.
  - 7 Wolfendale, J., (2007), "My Avatar My Self: Virtual Harm and Attachment", *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 9, pp. 111-119.

Like the gods, of whose divine essence I understand myself to partake, I have a drive to create. In my theology the divine totality created matter from energy, being from non being. Now humans can create form without matter in virtual worlds. This completes an oscillation, maintaining balance. By means of this creation I can put a piece of my soul into my avatar. Second Living is the *Aaru* of modern existence, the ideal world the ancient Egyptians spent their lives preparing for and expected to join in after mortal death. It is an idealized version of life. We are using virtual worlds to live, here on Earth, the perfected life Egyptians didn't get until they were dead.

When I first entered the world and began my journey from human to resident, it was a strange and amazing place to me. Now, after years of immersion in it, I am different. I grok<sup>8</sup> it. Actually it is more true to say that I grok the part of it I encountered, for Second Life is a rich and diverse set of places. It is thousands of worlds, tens of thousands; because not only are there as many worlds as sims<sup>9</sup>, but there are as many perceptual worlds as there are residents. We delude ourselves into thinking that we all live in this same world, but we don't. We each look into the universe through our own distinct, individual eyes. Even those we are closest to don't have the exact same vision as us.

As I was sharing a particular ancient Egyptian flavoured corner of the virtual world with a variety of residents, none of whom I have met in meatspace, and who are from a wide variety of cultures, age groups, religions, educations and reality tunnels, the differences in our perceptions of the same virtual space are myriad. Some perceptions were shared in real and deep ways, and some weren't. Some were withheld. Some things shared were a tissue of lies. Some were lost in translation, either on account of a language or cultural barrier, or because of the inability we have to truly know the other. Even when we seek union in the most intimate of ways, we can not know as the other does until grokking is.

We are agnostic of the other's reality tunnel in our subjective lives. It is the presence of this absence, the space that can only be filled by grokking the other, that causes rational knowledge alone to be lacking. Yet, I am not advocating a rejection of the Platonic or Cartesian philosophies that conceptualization humans as thinking things in favour of a radical existentialist position. Perhaps my thinking is philosophically closest to the Heideggerian position, that we are Dasein<sup>10</sup>, a being engaged in the world who reflects on that world. Although I don't think it possible to separate the being part from the thinking part, when I examine the actions of others and ponder on the meaning those actions might have for them, I am necessarily relying more on the thinking part of myself. Accordingly I caution the reader

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8 This word was coined by Robert A. Heinlein in his book "Stranger in a Strange Land" and means to understand a thing so fully as to become one with it.

9 Short for simulation. A region of virtual land 256x256 metres that is supplied by Linden Lab.

10 Heidegger, M., (1962), *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, New York.

that when I remark that a certain person's actions indicate that they are thinking a certain thing or forming meanings in a certain way this is an expression of my reflection on my experience of being in the world with those people. It is my understanding of how they might be understanding the world. It is my reality not theirs. As such it is not necessarily exactly how they might characterise what they are doing. This is a necessary process if one is to explore the cloud of unknowing that characterises relationships with other humans via the mediated experience of cyberspace. I am relating the process of my gnosis in cyberspace. It is because of my desire to share the real, the real that I know to be real, that I render my story in the first person. Trying to tell the stories of others involves such a great degree of uncertainty. I feel most honest when telling my own story. Yet part of my story is forming an understanding of how others understand the world. It is the difficulty of grokking the other that I seek to highlight.

I spent two and a half years as a participant researcher in order to gather data for this autoethnography. I usually spent about 60 hours a week in the world. During the course of this time I participated in two separate Second Life communities, Anachronistic Lands - Ptolemaic Egypt and Nubian Egypt, the latter being formed in January 2009 following the collapse of the former. It is unusual in Second Life for a role-playing community to exist for longer than a year. Internet time<sup>11</sup> certainly exists in Second Life. The logistical, interpersonal and financial skills necessary to manage and maintain a community are uncommon among Second Life residents. During the period of my research I saw a continuing stream of communities being founded and then failing, usually for the same reasons. These reasons are split between being caused by residents' actions and Linden Lab's (the company who produced Second Life) policy. But more on that later.

When we enter virtual worlds we take large pieces of our meatspace culture with us: virtual worlds are not *tabulae rasae*. They are, like the colonial world of my forebears, populated by dreamers, misfits and pioneers from the old world. The denizens of the virtual come from the old world, the physical world, meatspace. The place where the bounds and exigencies of the meat bind us, tie us, limit the possible. When we enter a virtual world we leave some of those bounds behind us, we can, for instance, fly as avatars in Second Life. But some bounds we must still abide by. Avatars don't need to eat: the humans driving them still do. We enter a world which has its own new kinds of limits; no smells, no touch and its own demands; high end computers, fast internet access. Malpas is correct when he states that the virtual is "always dependent, in a variety of ways, on the everyday world within which it is embedded"<sup>12</sup>. This obvious statement is objectively true. There is one world, in

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11 Odlyzko, A., (2001), *The Myth of "Internet Time"*, <http://www.technologyreview.com/review/400952/the-myth-of-internet-time/>. Accessed 19/01/2013.

12 Malpas, J., (2009), "On the Non Autonomy of the Virtual", *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 135.

the sense Malpas means, but this is not what one means when one speaks of entering a virtual world. Perhaps this is why we call them virtual worlds and not other physical realities.

When entering a virtual world one does not imagine that one is leaving the one physical reality of which we are all aware and entering another world of the same type. At least no one I met does. Rather one imagines oneself entering another world in the same way that a god enters our world: as an avatar. When we enter a virtual world we are as beings who live in one world, where we have many abilities and capabilities, but who have chosen to enter another world as a phantasm, whereby our abilities are limited by the form we must take to enter it. Like the manifesting god, our meatspace self continues to exist in its native reality, but our avatar exists as the means by which we experience the new world.

The primary way that avatars express their being in these new worlds is by the stories they tell each other. Some of these stories are told visually, the avatar's attire, for instance, indicating their role, the place in the community they inhabit. But most of the avatars' stories in the communities I studied were conveyed by the creation that was their role play performance. This performance is communicated mostly in words. It is through these words that the avatars express their sociocultural, political and their personal lives. I chose autoethnography as it is the method which best enables me to communicate that world, as I experienced it, to you. But what really is an autoethnography?

In 2000 Ellis noted a trend towards authors who have made themselves and their personal experience a central feature of their research<sup>13</sup>. Ellis remarks that, in many cases, whether a social science work is called an autoethnography or an ethnography depends on the claims made by authors and those who write about it<sup>14</sup>. Moreover Ellis goes on to say that nowadays things are labeled autoethnography which used to be called personal narratives, narratives of the self, personal experience narratives, self-stories, personal essays, ethnographic short stories, complete member research, opportunistic research, self-ethnography, critical autobiography, radical empiricism, ethnobiography, emotionalism, experiential texts, and many more terms besides<sup>15</sup>.

Looking back to the origins of the form, Ellis notes that Karl Heider used the term in 1975 to refer to the Dani's own account of what people do, but gives Hayano as the person usually considered to be the originator of the term, he using it only in the case of "cultural level studies by anthropologists of their

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13 Denzin, D. (ed), Lincoln, Y. S. (ed), (2000), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, pp. 733-734.

14 Ellis, C., (2003), *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, AltaMira, Walnut Creek, p. 39.

15 Denzin, D. (ed), Lincoln, Y. S. (ed), (2000), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, p. 739.

'own people', in which the researcher is a full insider by virtue of being 'native', acquiring an intimate familiarity with the group, or achieving full membership in the group being studied"<sup>16</sup>. Hayano himself however states that "I first heard the term auto ethnography used in Sir Raymond Firth's structuralism seminar in 1966 at the London School of Economics"<sup>17</sup>. Hayano identifies two major types of autoethnography, the first being those written by insiders, here, for example, he cites Roy's<sup>18</sup> 1975 study of Bengali women, noting that Roy is both a Bengali and a woman<sup>19</sup>. The second type being those written by "researchers who have acquired an intimate familiarity with certain subcultural, recreational, or occupational groups"<sup>20</sup>. Moreover he notes a subcategory of this second type which "occurs when individuals become formally and informally socialized, after indoctrination, into a specific group or role-type with some specialized knowledge or way of life"<sup>21</sup>.

It is interesting to note though that Hayano was only conceiving these two types as variants of studies by indigenous insiders of ethnic or subcultural groups. Indeed it was this conception of autoethnography which was its only meaning in the early years of the form. This conception was the cause of some rather insulting critiques, with argument centering on the question of whether "native" authors could be objective enough. Unsurprisingly some insiders, among them Chilungu<sup>22</sup>, took umbrage at arguments that insiders must necessarily be biased when compared to outside observers. However some "native" authors early on were strong supports of the ideal of objectivity, notably Srinivas<sup>23</sup>, who argued that objective research procedures, detachment and uninvolved involvement were more important than intense personal familiarity.

Michael Jackson argues in "Paths Towards a Clearing"<sup>24</sup> that objective detachment is a requirement of positivist social science, and he sees a problem in writing about people without distorting their thoughts and making them appear mechanical. His suggested solution is "radical empiricism" a process that includes the ethnographers' experiences and interactions with other participants as vital parts of what is being studied. Hayano however criticises overobjectivity, writing that even Malinowski "misunderstood,

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16 Ellis, C., (2003), *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, AltaMira, Walnut Creek, p. 38.

17 Hayano, D. M., (1979), "Auto Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects", *Human Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 99.

18 Roy, M., (1975), *Bengali Women*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

19 Hayano, D. M., (1979), "Auto Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects", *Human Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 100.

20 Hayano, D. M., (1979), "Auto Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects", *Human Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 100.

21 Hayano, D. M., (1979), "Auto Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects", *Human Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 100.

22 Chilungu, S. W., (1976) "Issues in the Ethics of Research Method: An Interpretation of the Anglo-American Perspective", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 457-481.

23 Srinivas, M. N., (1966) *Social Change in Modern India*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

24 Jackson, M., (1989), *Paths toward a clearing: Radical empiricism and ethnographic inquiry*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 20.

misinterpreted, or inaccurately described important features of native life and culture"<sup>25</sup>. Ellis sees the academic pursuit of objectivity as a shortcoming, arguing that the use of the third person passive voice removes personal accountability and thus gives more weight to abstract and categorical knowledge<sup>26</sup>. Another of the criticisms of subjective research is that "cultural realities and interpretations of events among individuals in the same group are often highly variable, changing or contradictory"<sup>27</sup> and that, as such, this kind of research only presents a single interpretation of events rather than a single, objective truth. I shall argue that this is in fact the value of this method. Taking a subjective approach forces one to admit that there are many truths.

Jones<sup>28</sup> was an early advocate for a more subjective approach, arguing for the validity of an approach which seeks to present on behalf of and beneficial to one's own group. Adler and Adler called this kind of research complete member research and defined it as referring to "researchers who are fully committed to and immersed in the groups they study"<sup>29</sup>. For myself I most identify with Megan and Wood's expression of "becoming the phenomenon"<sup>30</sup>. It seems to me that anything less is like trying to explain what it is to be a fish by gazing into a fishbowl. In being troubled by this gaze I seem to be an incarnation of what Scheper-Hughes is describing when she says "Many younger anthropologists today, sensitized by the writing of Michel Foucault on power/knowledge, have come to think of anthropological fieldwork as a kind of invasive, disciplinary 'panopticon' and the anthropological interview as similar to the medieval inquisition confession though which church examiners extracted 'truth' from thier native and 'heretical' peasant practitioners"<sup>31</sup>.

Scheper-Hughes wrestled with the ethical conundrum of being an allegedly detached observer, at first telling the objects of her enquiry that according to the dictates of anthropology, "I cannot be an anthropologist and a *companheira* at the same time"<sup>32</sup> but later realising that "...there was little virtue to false neutrality in the face of the broad political and moral dramas of life and death, good and evil, that were being played out..."<sup>33</sup>.

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25 Hayano, D. M., (1979), "Auto Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects", *Human Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 102.

26 Denzin, D. (ed), Lincoln, Y. S. (ed), (2000), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, p. 734.

27 Hayano, D. M., (1979), "Auto Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects", *Human Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 102.

28 Jones, D. J., (1970), "Towards a Native Anthropology", *Human Organization*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 251-259.

29 Adler, P. A., Adler, P., (1987), *Membership Roles in Field Research*, Sage, Newbury Park.

30 Megan, H., Wood, H., (1975), *The Reality of Ethnomethodology*, John Wiley, New York.

31 Scheper-Hughes, N., (1995), "The Primacy of the Ethical", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 417.

32 Scheper-Hughes, N., (1995), "The Primacy of the Ethical", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 410.

33 Scheper-Hughes, N., (1995), "The Primacy of the Ethical", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 411.

For myself, I shall argue that objectivity is impossible in the human condition, that subjectivity is the only remaining option and that there is never a single truth. Once we can get past the Enlightenment conceit that there is a single, rational, true, way of knowing, and that European males are the only ones who can find it, true progress can be made. If I had in fact not been a committed member of the communities I studied the members would not have wished me to do this research. This response has been noted before in studying internet communities. Hudson and Bruckman conducted research in IRC chatrooms and found that 63% of the chatrooms they entered ejected them as soon as they indicated they were researchers who wished to study the chat<sup>34</sup>.

In the present day discussions about autoethnography have broadened to consider not only the value of a subjective approach but also of a narrative one, with Ellis defining autoethnography as "...an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple levels of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural"<sup>35</sup>. Ellis argues for a personal, narrative approach on the basis that,

Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding and are not unique to autoethnography. Stories are the focus of Homeric literature, oral traditions, narrative analysis, and fairy tales. Given their importance I argue that stories should be both a subject and a method of social science research<sup>36</sup>.

Critics of narrative approaches have argued that stories fictionalise life by giving life a structure it does not have<sup>37</sup> or that they are in fact a "Romantic construction of the self"<sup>38</sup> and thus cannot be considered to be genuine social science, rather, Atkinson claims, they are journeys of self discovery which cannot be the same thing as analysis. In reply to the first criticism I stand with Adrienne Rich, who argues that "The story of our lives becomes our lives"<sup>39</sup>, that is, reality is constituted for us not in what objectively happened, which we can never know, but in what we tell ourselves happened. To the latter criticism I reply that analysis is an important tool in self discovery, a life unreflected on is no life, as Heinlein puts it in the words of his perennial hero Lazarus Long, "A generation that ignores history has no past and no future"<sup>40</sup>.

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34 Hudson, J. M., Bruckman, A., (2004), "'Go Away': Participant Objections to Being Studied and the Ethics of Chatroom Research", *The Information Society*, No. 20, pp. 127-139.

35 Denzin, D. (ed), Lincoln, Y. S. (ed), (2000), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, p. 739.

36 Ellis, C., (2003), *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, AltaMira, Walnut Creek, p. 32.

37 Mink, L., (1970), "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension", *New Literary History*, No. 1, pp. 541-558.

38 Atkinson, (1997), "Narrative Turn in a Blind Alley", *Qualitative Health Research*, No. 7, pp. 325-344.

39 Rich, A., (1978), *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, W. W. Norton, New York.

40 Heinlein, R. A., (1973), *Time Enough For Love*, Putnam, New York.



I say this because we are always living in the past, constructing reality in retrospect because of the way our perceptual system functions. Our perception continuously lags 80ms after events occur and our brain constructs our perceptual reality after the fact, even correcting for this lag by editing what we actually perceived<sup>41</sup>. In effect, we tell ourselves a story to frame our perceptions. And the story is, "I perceive that thing to be red and I perceive that thing to be hot. And I can also perceive that a thermometer indicates that that thing is 100 degrees of this perception I call hot." First comes the trigger, then the perception. The 100 degrees, the science of the perception is tertiary. It's fantastically useful, but it is tertiary to the trigger and secondary to one's own perception of hot. Imagination is where we live. Everything is a remix and everything is a story. It is the performance of the story of the remix that constitutes what we know and are.

The aforementioned criticisms are ignoring this vital factor, our lives are not texts, they are performances. Blain, Ezzy et al. note that scholars have recently begun to embrace performance as a useful analytical category, especially in religious studies, sociology, anthropology, ritual studies and gender studies<sup>42</sup>. This study is of a performance of Ancient Egyptian Pagan worlds being recreated in Second Life. Paganism is an inherently experiential religion, as Lynne Hume puts it "doing is knowing"<sup>43</sup>. Paganism is low on dogma and high on experience. Tanya Luhrmann argued<sup>44</sup> that people become Pagans as a result of experiencing the practice and building from that the conceptualisation of the Pagan universe. The doing creates the knowing.

In the virtual world of Second Life one's doing is hampered, it is at one remove, filtered by the interface. Bonewits<sup>45</sup> writes of the widely known necessity of stimulating as many senses as possible in order to create effective ritual, but in Second Life there is no smell or touch, and one's other senses are limited. In my experience there is an awareness of the desirability of initiating a full range of sensory stimulation in order to produce efficacious rituals in present day Pagan communities. So knowing this, and yet continuing to participate in rituals in the virtual world practitioners of virtual rituals are knowingly accepting a limitation to their practice. However only some members of the Second Life communities revealed herein are Pagans in the meatspace world. Of those few who are some do realise the limitations the virtual space has in regards to ritual practice and work hard to find accommodations for virtual ritual. These are the residents most likely to participate in rituals in the virtual space. Those residents of these

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41 Eagleman, D. M., Sejnowski, T. J., (2007), "Motion Signals Bias Localization Judgments: A Unified Explanation for the flash-lag, flash-drag, flash-jump, and Frohlich Illusions", *Journal of Vision*, Vol. 7, No. 4.

42 Blain, J. (ed), Ezzy, D. (ed), Harvey, G. (ed), (2004), *Researching Paganisms*, AltaMira, Walnut Creek, p. 17.

43 Hume, L., (1997), *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 1-15.

44 Luhrmann, T. M., (1989), *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Harvard University Press.

45 Bonewits, I., (2003), *Rites of Worship: A Neopagan Approach*, Earth Religions Press, pp. 181-209.

communities who are not Pagans still have an awareness of the limitations of the virtual world they choose to inhabit. They too strive to find ways to make their virtual experiences more rich. But they too live with acknowledged limitations.

Why would one choose to experience a limiting reality? For the same reason divine avatars choose to come into our world, because one is required to do so in order to enter it. It is my experience that accepting a limitation is usually born of one of two things. The first is that utter gnawing, unbeatable, indefatigable frustration that accompanies chronic irremediable situations such as chronic pain or war. The second is because there is a trade-off, some other circumstance that makes it worthwhile for one to accept a seemingly crucial limitation. Some benefit to be gained from this acceptance. While some individuals in the virtual world are indubitably dealing with chronic pain, or other disabilities that limit their access to the normal social intercourse that most take for granted, they are a minority. They are probably represented in the virtual world in the same proportions as they are in the meatspace world. This means that for the vast majority of the population of virtual worlds the desperation driven acceptance of limitation is not the reason for their participation. This leaves only the trade-off. This thesis then is the record of my quest to find what that thing is, or those things are, that virtual worlds offer that causes their residents to accept the crucial limitations inherent in the experience and still attempt to know by doing.

Humans enter virtual worlds because they are, in a variety of ways, different, better, more desirable, more engaging than meatspace. One can do things in them one cannot do in meatspace. Yes, they are lacking in some ways in comparison to meatspace, deficient in satiating our full range of senses, but the balance of their benefits must be substantial or so many of the humans who visit them wouldn't prefer<sup>46 47</sup> to spend time in virtual worlds rather than in meatspace, wouldn't build lives, communities and religions there, wouldn't game until they die<sup>48</sup>, wouldn't stay immersed while their meatspace children die for lack of attention<sup>49 50</sup>.

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46 Castronova, E., Wagner, G. G., (2011), "Virtual Life Satisfaction", *Kyklos*, Vol. 64, Issue 3, pp. 313-328.

47 Castronova, E., (2001), "Virtual worlds: A first-hand account of market and society on the cyberian frontier", *CESifo Working Paper Series*, No. 618, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=294828>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

48 Parkin, S., (2012), *Death by gaming: an investigation into the Taiwan café fatalities*, <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-09-19-death-by-gaming-why-taiwans-cafe-culture-is-killing-gamers>, Accessed 26/01/2014

49 CBSNews, (2010), *Gaming Addicts Guilty of Starving Baby to Death*, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/gaming-addicts-guilty-of-starving-baby-to-death-28-05-2010/>, Accessed 26/01/2014.

50 Farberov, S., (2013), *Parents 'were so immersed in fantasy video game world where their avatars married and had jobs they let real-life daughter, 2, nearly starve to death'*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2455567/Parents-immersed-video-game-daughter-nearly-starved-death.html>, Accessed 26/01/2014.

Marc Prensky<sup>51</sup> introduced the term 'Digital Natives' in 2001, explaining that, "Our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet". This is, mostly, true of all the twenty first century born generations of the developed world. But this digital fluency alone does not make them natives of virtual worlds. Perhaps avatars are natives of the virtual, but in fact, these new worlds have no human natives<sup>52</sup>. No human has, yet, been born in, initially exclusively socialized in, and come into sentience in, a virtual world.

Virtual worlds have no natives that we are displacing, colonising, assimilating. We can make a new space of our own, that we aren't stealing from someone else. A clean colonisation, and we embrace it, we misfits and explorers, seekers of new places, and spaces, and worlds of being anew. Not autonomous, obviously, but fresh. Worlds of our creation. Worlds of our ultimate creation. Ultimate creation because these are not only worlds we create in, like the meatspace one, they are worlds we first created, from scratch, macrocosm and microcosm. The macrocosm is the rendered virtual world we see on our screens, its microcosm, the code. It is this pioneering appeal that draws residents into them. On this planet there are few frontiers to run away to. To board one's Mayflower in search of. Few frontiers to draw those who, like my austral forebears, sought a new life in the antipodes. Virtual worlds are the antipodes of meatspace.

## Encountering A New World

In early two thousand and eight I was pondering what to do for my PhD. One of the lecturers in my department had just obtained a grant to develop a space in Second Life to use in the teaching of religion to undergraduates. It was she who first initiated me into the mysteries of Second Life. She showed me how to get an avatar and how to get around. Then she started to show me some interesting Pagan places in the world. One of those places was a sim where a group of Pagans met. A sim, short for simulation, is a 256x256 metre block of land. One day we turned up there to discover that the group was doing a ritual, a solstice ritual. I was both enchanted and querulous. Why, I found myself asking myself, are these people undertaking an activity so heavily reliant on embodied experiences in a space where one's sense of the visceral, the sensual, is severely limited? I was so amazed, so keen to understand what was motivating these people that I decided to examine this question for my PhD.

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51 Prensky, M., (2001), "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants", *On the Horizon*, Vol. 9, No. 5, pp. 1-6, <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives.%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

52 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 85.

But then I asked myself the question, is the divine in the world? My first instinct, being a panentheist, was that it must be. The divine is in all things. Ergo, it is in the world. But I wanted to find it. I wanted gnosis. Not just knowledge. Gnosis in the world. Logic and reason are not enough. Sensation is required. We have a mind and a body. The relationship of them to each other is at the core of our being. I wanted gnosis in my body to signify the presence of the divine in a non corporeal world. This seems contradictory. But it had to be this way. My self includes my body. My knowledge of my self is completely coincident with my time in this body. Therefore the way I identify the presence of the divine is a combination of mental and physical responses. I would not settle for reason alone.

It is worth bearing in mind that this study was not possible until today. Virtual worlds are some of the newest horizons of human endeavour. The ways of being within (and without) them are only just now coming into being. We have only just arrived at the point at which it is possible to have these types of experiences, the Heideggerian disclosure point where a new world becomes possible. The way we experience being within them is likewise a product of the now. It is a transient thing. Once this cultural moment is past the sum of the experiences that we have had in virtual worlds will be added to our culture and it will not be possible to go back and have that moment again in exactly the same way as we are having it now. Not only that, but it has been impossible until now to have a discourse about the way we are being now. It is a discourse of the moment. We can't describe a condition until it has been fulfilled. Once fulfilled we can describe it. Once described, it can never happen again in exactly the same way. We will have added its cultural and technological distinctiveness to our own. It will have become part of us and we will have become a new thing on account of having done it.

Apart from my own quest for gnosis, this study is worth doing for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most immediately apparent is that no one has published a study of this type and scope before. Despite the fact that role play is one of the activities most commonly undertaken in Second Life there are no monographs to date which are ethnographic studies of particular role play communities in Second Life. Most monographs about Second Life focus on the nature of the world in general<sup>53 54 55</sup> or the process of its initial creation<sup>56 57 58</sup>. Now that Second Life has past its ten year milestone it is time to move beyond such studies and see what it has become.

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53 Meadows, M. S., (2007), *I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life*, New Riders, Berkeley.

54 Guest, T. (2008), *Second Lives: A Journey Through Virtual Worlds*, Random House, New York.

55 Montagne, O. (2007), *Metaverse Manifesto*, Studio SFO, San Francisco.

56 Au, W. J., (2008), *The Making of Second Life: Notes From the New World*, Collins, New York.

57 Ludlow, P., Wallace, M., (2007), *The Second Life Herald: The Virtual Tabloid That Witnessed the Dawn of the Metaverse*, The MIT Press, Cambridge.

58 Malaby, T. M., (2009), *Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life*, Cornell University Press, New York.

Another reason this study is valuable is that it makes an important contribution to the study of religion on the internet. While there has been much discussion of religion on the internet since its very earliest days<sup>59</sup> the development of virtual worlds opens a whole new set of possibilities for immersive ritual online. Using virtual worlds we can begin to experience religion in cyberspace in a very visceral way, one which moves beyond the possibilities of the text only experiences that characterised early experiments in religion in cyberspace.

Role play will also be central to this study. It is the thing that brings these communities alive. The essential core of what they are is the characters who inhabit them, and the characters those characters create. However before the communities can be created their venue needs to have been created. So before I delve deeper into these communities I will provide a little background to the games virtual worlds developed from.

## Virtual Worlds: Definition And History

Second Life is not a game, though it couldn't have come to pass were it not for the computer games in which the basic functions and concepts it depends on were developed. This quick survey of the early history of computer games will show how these basic elements of functionality were present even from the earliest games. For a more detailed history of virtual worlds see Ok<sup>60</sup>.

Those who enter Second Life's world are not known as players, but as residents. There are 37.3 million registered residents, of whom somewhere between 27 and 62 thousand (depending on the time of day) are in the world at any one time<sup>61</sup>. The figure for the number of total residents is however problematic. It would be more accurate to say that there are that number of registered accounts, as the number of residents does not equal the number of accounts. This is because any one human person can have more than one account. The number of accounts actually equals the number of avatars, as an account is tied to a single named avatar. If one wishes to have more than one avatar one must make a new account. Moreover not all avatars are for the use of a human, some are used for bots (short for robots) which are a method of automating an avatar by means of software.

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59 Campbell, H., (2005), "Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies", *The Information Society*, No. 21, pp. 310-313.

60 Ok, A., (2011), *Timeline of Virtual Worlds*, [http://www.dipity.com/xantherus/Virtual\\_Worlds/](http://www.dipity.com/xantherus/Virtual_Worlds/). Accessed 02/04/2014.

61 Voyager, D., (2014), *SL Metrics*, <http://danielvoyager.wordpress.com/sl-metrics/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

Second Life is a world, a venue<sup>62</sup>. There has been a lot of debate about whether or not Second Life is a game<sup>63</sup>. However games have defining features that Second Life lacks. Most notable is the lack of victory conditions: there is no way to win, or lose, Second Life. The definition of what constitutes success is entirely up to the resident. Games have rules while Second Life has Terms of Service<sup>64</sup> and community standards<sup>65</sup>. The free form nature of Second Life and the ability of users to create whatever they wish are important characteristics that set it apart from online games.

What is a virtual world? Looking first at the second of these two words, it seems certain to me that space is a defining feature of any world. The physical world we inhabit is defined for us by the fact that it has space. Worlds have space. But it can be imagined space. This space can be described in many ways. It could be the kind of imagined space found in early text based adventure games like Will Crowther's Colossal Cave Adventure (see figure 1<sup>66</sup>), written in 1975-1976<sup>67</sup>, and which was the precursor for the entire genre of role playing adventure games. Such games were incredibly successful for the first companies that exclusively made and sold computer games, like Adventure International, the company that in 1978 released the first version of Adventure for personal computers<sup>68</sup>, Adventureland. Unlike Colossal Cave Adventure, Adventureland included graphics as well as text (see figure 2<sup>69</sup>).

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62 Castronova, E., (2007), *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 59-60.

63 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 22.

64 Linden Lab, *Linden Lab Terms of Service*, <http://lindenlab.com/tos>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

65 Linden Lab, *Second Life Community Standards*, <http://secondlife.com/corporate/cs.php>, Accessed 14/06/2009.

66 From [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ADVENT\\_-\\_Will\\_Crowther\\_%27s\\_original\\_version.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ADVENT_-_Will_Crowther_%27s_original_version.png)

67 Jerz, D. G., (2007), "Somewhere Nearby is Colossal Cave: Examining Will Crowther's Original 'Adventure' in Code and in Kentucky", *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/001/2/000009/000009.html>, Accessed 31/01/2013.

68 TRS-80, Apple II series, Atari 8-bit, TI-99/4A, Commodore PET, Commodore 64, IBM-PC, Commodore VIC-20, ZX Spectrum, BBC Micro, Acorn Electron, Dragon 32/64, Exidy Sorcerer.

69 From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Adventureland\\_Cover.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Adventureland_Cover.png)

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.RUN ADV11

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!!  WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?

YES
SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND
FORTUNES IN TREASURE AND GOLD, THOUGH IT IS RUMORED
THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER SEEN AGAIN.  MAGIC IS SAID
TO WORK IN THE CAVE.  I WILL BE YOUR EYES AND HANDS.  DIRECT
ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.
(ERRORS, SUGGESTIONS, COMPLAINTS TO CROWTHER)
(IF STUCK TYPE HELP FOR SOME HINTS)

YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK
BUILDING .  AROUND YOU IS A FOREST.  A SMALL
STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND DOWN A GULLY.

GO IN
YOU ARE INSIDE A BUILDING, A WELL HOUSE FOR A LARGE SPRING.

THERE ARE SOME KEYS ON THE GROUND HERE.

THERE IS A SHINY BRASS LAMP NEARBY.

THERE IS FOOD HERE.

THERE IS A BOTTLE OF WATER HERE.
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figure 1. Will Crowther's Colossal Cave Adventure

Role playing adventure games were among the earliest computer games and initially their worlds were described by means of text only. The user would log into the game and see only text which described the world. These games allowed users to interact with the game using simple text commands like 'look up', 'turn left' and 'get lamp'<sup>70</sup>. The game would then echo text to the screen that described what the user was seeing. Even in this earliest of games the functionality to pick up and carry objects was provided. This adds vital interactivity to the game and is practically ubiquitous in contemporary role playing and adventure games.



figure 2. Cover of Adventureland

<sup>70</sup> Scott, J., (2010), *Get Lamp*, <http://www.getlamp.com/>. Accessed 11/02/2014.



Though both Adventureland and Colossal Cave Adventure were single player games, the latter ran on a PDP-10 mainframe<sup>71</sup>, these games were the precursors of Multi User Dungeons (MUDs) - the first multiplayer real time virtual worlds. The first MUD was written in 1978 by an Essex University student, Roy Trubshaw<sup>72</sup>. In 1980 it became the first internet multiplayer online role playing game when Essex University connected its internal network to ARPANet<sup>73</sup>. Once MUDs had been developed game space was suddenly a shared space, and the rest is history. By 1992 there were more than 170 different multi user games on the net<sup>74</sup>. It is probably hard for those who have had multi user games and the internet for their entire lives to imagine, but there was something magical about the first time one connected to a network and communicated with other actual humans via it.

Such games have a virtual space, but rather than being presented on the screen in exquisitely rendered detail, as in Second Life, the spaces are imagined using the information the game developer provides - "It's a virtual reality that exists in words"<sup>75</sup>. Though the space in such games was not graphically represented it is nonetheless a world in the same way that, say, Tolkien's Middle Earth is a world. Its geography is described in detail and, once one becomes familiar with the world, one can wander freely in it. From this perspective text based MUDs are worlds even though we can't see them. While text based worlds were incredibly popular when they first arrived on the gaming scene they were not durable. Once graphically rendered worlds arrived text based worlds virtually disappeared. They did however spawn the genre of interactive fiction, which still endures. Role playing adventure games have an appeal that shooter type games don't. The actions of the user dictate the outcomes of the game to a much greater extent. No two players playing Adventure would have had the same experience because of the importance the player's imagination has in creating the world of the game.

A common criticism of virtual worlds is that they are somehow not real, or are less real, than the meatspace world because they are simulated. Comparisons with the meatspace world are usually the basis for discussions of what is real or not. If things are in meatspace they are real things. By this logic alone virtual worlds are real, however there remains a common perception that they are not truly in this world. Ever since the earliest computer environments things in the virtual have been simulations of, or modeled on, things in the meatspace world. For example the cave system in Adventure was modeled

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71 Jerz, D. G., (2007), "Somewhere Nearby is Colossal Cave: Examining Will Crowther's Original 'Adventure' in Code and in Kentucky", *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/001/2/000009/000009.html>, Accessed 31/01/2013.

72 Bartle, R. A., (1990), *Early MUD History*, <http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/mudhist.htm>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

73 Mulligan, J., Patrovsky, B., (2003), *Developing Online Games: An Insider's Guide*, New Riders Publishing, USA, p. 444.

74 Rheingold, H., (2000), *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 149.

75 Scott, J., (2010), *Get Lamp*, <http://www.getlamp.com/>, Accessed 11/02/2014.



after part of the Bedquilt Cave in Kentucky<sup>76</sup>, and modeled so well that a woman who had played the game and then went caving in Bedquilt Cave found she had no difficulty in navigating it<sup>77</sup>. This ability to simulate the real for educational purposes is one of the great advantages of virtual worlds.

Although it is tempting to venture down the rabbit hole and ask the question of whether the real world is simulated, there is simply not space here to examine that thread adequately. Instead I shall say that simulations are real things. Our modern world is full of simulations; synthetic fibres, artificial flavours, fiat money, things that seem like other things but aren't quite them. Nonetheless these things are real. We know they are real because we can perceive them. I find myself in full agreement with Humphrey, who argues that perception is reality, that "to be conscious is essentially to have sensations: that is to have affect-laden mental representations of something happening here and now to me"<sup>78</sup>. All we know of the meatspace world we know through our senses. Our senses report to our brain which builds a mental model of the world inside itself. We call that model reality. Perception then comprises the nature of the real and whatever we can perceive is in some way real. Repetition of perceptions strengthens the reality status of things perceived. The things we perceive are perceptual clouds, our knowing of them built up from the serial perceptions we have of them. Not each perception of a given object is exactly the same, but they share enough similarity for us to group them together in a cloud of knowing and to thus identify them as being the same thing. Unless we gain omniscience we cannot know a thing as it objectively is, we can only know our perceptions of it. Our perceptions are therefore our reality. This space that we can perceive, or imagine we perceive, in text based worlds makes them virtual worlds. Once we have perceived things we remember, and repeat, and remix those perceptions and they become our new creations.

While the aforementioned text based worlds certainly have perceivable space this definition alone is not very useful when trying to talk about the online virtual worlds we have today. It is too broad. Bartle defines the world part of virtual worlds as "A world is an environment that its inhabitants regard as being self-contained. It doesn't have to mean an entire planet: It's used in the same sense as 'the Roman world' or 'the world of high finance'"<sup>79</sup>. This definition focuses on the space alone, and while that is enough to make it a world, what is captivating about a virtual world for me is that I can interact with the space. Early on much of Second Life was just a dressed set, a backdrop against which one could set scenarios of one's choice. Interaction was very limited indeed. While a world is still a world even if one can't interact with it, it's much more engaging if one can. Most of the early

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76 Montfort, N. (2003), *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach To Interactive Fiction*, The MIT Press, Cambridge.

77 Adams, R., *The real 'Colossal Cave'*, [http://www.rickadams.org/adventure/b\\_cave.html](http://www.rickadams.org/adventure/b_cave.html), Accessed 31/01/2014.

78 Humphrey, N., (1992), *A History of the Mind: Evolution and the Birth of Consciousness*, Simon & Schuster, New York, p. 155.

79 Bartle, R. A., (2004), *Designing Virtual Worlds*, New Riders Publishers, Berkeley.

interaction in Second Life wasn't very engaging, and was with other avatars, rather than with objects, as interactive objects were difficult to construct and often clumsy.

Castronova includes others to interact with in his definition when he describes virtual world as "crafted places inside computers that are designed to accommodate large numbers of people"<sup>80</sup>. Second Life is certainly crafted, but it is not a good exemplar of a space that accommodates large numbers of people. The maximum number of avatars one can have in a sim is 40, though in practice this number is lower, as sim performance is drastically effected as avatar numbers increase. Raph Koster, a virtual world developer, also sees the presence of others as vital and he includes the presence of avatars in his definition, "a virtual world is a spatially based depiction of a persistent virtual environment, which can be experienced by numerous participants at once, who are represented within the space by avatars"<sup>81</sup>. While the presence of avatars makes it easier to relate to others, their absence doesn't preclude the environment from being a virtual world, the world is still there. This definition, like Lortz's, excludes not only single user worlds but also worlds where the user is not represented as an avatar but can still act in the world, such as worlds where the purpose of the world is its building rather than its habitation by avatars. It also excludes the worlds of literature.

Bell focuses on the synchronicity of the humans rather than the world in his definition, "A synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers"<sup>82</sup>. Lastowka<sup>83</sup> likewise sees the social aspects as vital, "Virtual wolds are persistent, interactive, simulated social spaces where users employ avatars". Although I find Lastowka's definition the most agreeable, like other definitions that exclude single user worlds, I find it somewhat problematic. I can run an instance of OpenSimulator, an open source virtual world server, on my desktop computer, not connected to the internet, and enter a virtual world where I am the only person who can enter it. Even though I am alone there, it is still a world, my world, and I can interact with it. Indeed I often do this because I am fascinated by building worlds and find building its own reward, never intending to share those spaces with others, nor even inhabiting them myself as an avatar. Having others around is nice, but it's not a conclusive defining feature of a virtual world, while space and interactivity in that space are. Whether that interaction be imaginal or visual is not important. Whether it be solitary or communal is also not important. But what about avatars? Whether or not the user is graphically represented or not is not crucial. I consider text

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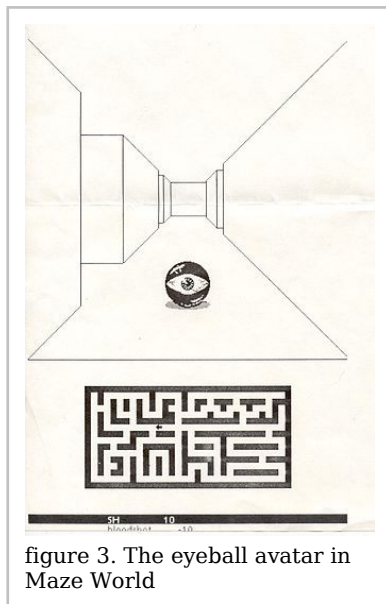
80 Castronova, E., (2006), *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*, University Of Chicago Press, Chicago.

81 Combs, N., (2004), *A virtual world by any other name?*, [http://terranova.blogs.com/terra\\_nova/2004/06/a\\_virtual\\_world.html](http://terranova.blogs.com/terra_nova/2004/06/a_virtual_world.html), Accessed 31/01/2014.

82 Bell, M. W., (2008), "Toward a Definition of 'Virtual Worlds'", *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 2.

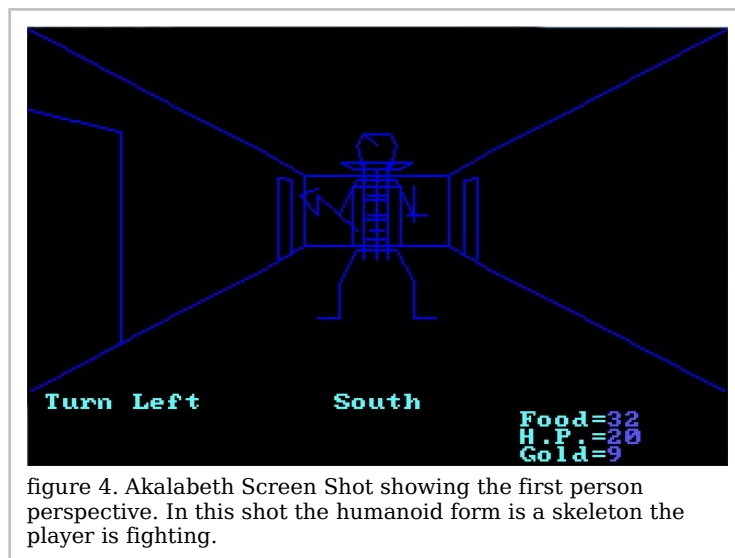
83 Lastowka, G., (2010), *Virtual Justice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 31.

based worlds to be virtual worlds. Text based games have avatars too, although the player has to imagine them and describe them to others by means of text.



The first computer game to represent users as graphical avatars was Maze War, written in 1973<sup>84</sup>. The players were represented as eyeballs (see figure 3<sup>85</sup>).

Akalabeth: World of Doom, one of the earliest examples of a role playing video game<sup>86</sup> shows the player only as a cross in the top down view of the playing field, but introduced an important innovation, the first person perspective (see figure 4<sup>87</sup>)<sup>88</sup>. Another approach taken by an early graphical game, Castle Wolfenstein (see figure 5<sup>89</sup>), is to show the playing field and the player's avatar, from a side view. However I prefer the first person view as it seems to me to provide a greater sense of immersion in the space.



84 Damer, B. F., (1997), *Avatars! Exploring and Building Virtual Worlds on the Internet*, Peach Pit Press, Berkeley.

85 From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maze\\_war.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maze_war.jpg)

86 Barton, M., (2009), *Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role-playing Games*, A. K. Peters Ltd, Wellesley, p. 1.

87 From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Akalabeth.jpg>

88 Scorpia, (1991), "C\*R\*P\*G\*S: Computer Role-Playing Game Survey", *Computer Gaming World*, No. 87, p. 108.

89 From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CastleWolfensteinC64.png>

While these two games have very basic avatars and functionality by today's standards, they already contain all the basic features found in contemporary worlds; avatars, three dimensional representation of space, ability to collect and use objects and text entry. These basic functions form the core of contemporary worlds, which have extended and expanded them into more complex forms. For example, avatars are obviously much more complex and sophisticated in today's games and virtual worlds than Maze War's eyeballs, with most offering a huge array of customization of player avatars. The first customisable experience one encounters in Second Life is one's avatar. Most avatars are humanoid, but this is not because non humanoid avatars are not possible, on the contrary, one's avatar can be anything at all. I have seen toadstools, cardboard boxes, robots, dragons, clouds, giant eyeballs and many kinds of chimera, of which furries (human-animal hybrids) are the most prevalent. Most users create humanoid avatars of the same sex as their meatspace selves, though 72% have at some time created an avatar of the opposite sex<sup>90</sup>.

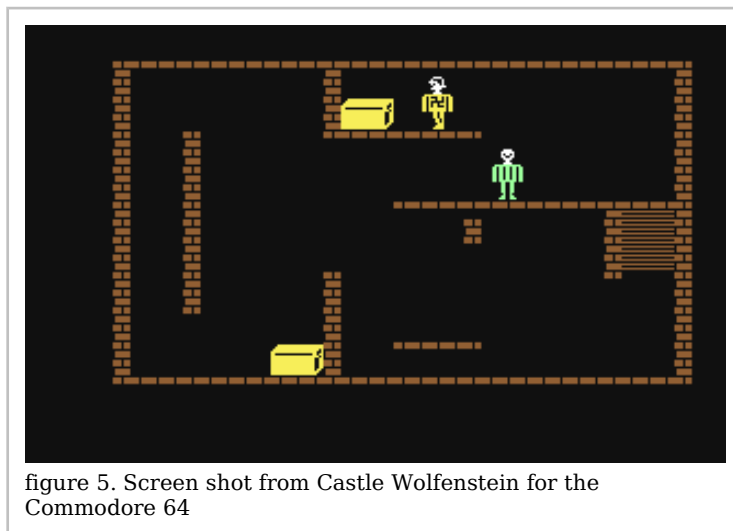


figure 5. Screen shot from Castle Wolfenstein for the Commodore 64

I have argued that neither avatars nor the presence of others are essential, and moreover that being connected to a network is also not vital, and indeed that text based games, which don't even necessarily require a computer to create a world - for example Dungeons and Dragons, are still virtual worlds. Consequently I offer a definition of virtual worlds as persistent simulated or imaginal spaces that facilitate user interaction with that space. I feel this definition encompass all possible virtual worlds; the worlds of literature, text based games, MUDs of all kinds, graphical worlds and fully immersive three dimensional worlds like Second Life. If one wishes to stipulate, qualifiers can be added. Thus Second Life is a persistent, simulated, multi user, graphical online world where residents interact by means of avatars.

90 Bell, M. W., Castronova, E., Wagner, G. G., (2009), *Surveying the Virtual World: A Large Scale Survey in Second Life Using the Virtual Data Collection Interface (VDCI)*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1418562>. Accessed 01/02/2011.

# Games In The World

Though Second Life is itself not a game, there are many games played in Second Life<sup>91</sup>. Many of these games have been created in, and are specific to, Second Life. For example the extremely popular game of Primtionary. This is a variation on Pictionary, though instead of drawing the word in question one must build it out of prims, the basic geometric shapes from which everything in the world is built. Shooting games of various types are also extremely popular. Scoring is usually effected through some kind of software meter that is not part of the software client but is a thing that the players wear which is paired with specially designed weapons. The meter keeps track of damage by recording the number of times an opponent's weapon hits the player. When a player has been hit a certain number of times the meter will declare them dead. The player then will either be immobilized for a set period of time or logged out of the game, thus incurring a penalty of the time it takes to log in again. There is capacity built into Second Life for an avatar to take damage<sup>92</sup>. However this only records damage taken by falling or colliding with physical objects and is optional, it must be discretely turned on in each sim. Most sim owners do not turn it on as it is very easy for a falling avatar to die and thus get evicted from the sim by accident and it allows some forms of grieving (the deliberate destruction or disruption of other's builds or activities) where player's avatars can be pushed around.

By far the most popular type of game in Second Life is role playing<sup>93</sup>. Lortz<sup>94</sup> explains that a role playing game is a game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment. The obvious deficiency of this definition is that it overlooks games where people are role playing non imaginal characters, such as historical ones or the case of role playing one's self. Some may argue that role playing one's self is not really role playing. Goffman<sup>95</sup> would disagree. Likewise this definition does not include non imaginal worlds or single player games.

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91 Second Life Destination Guide, *Games*, <http://secondlife.com/destinations/games>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

92 Second Life Wiki, *Damage*, <http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Damage>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

93 Leigh, M., Elwell, M., Cook, S., "Recreating Ancient Egyptian Culture in Second Life", *Proceedings of 2010 IEEE International Conference on Digital Game and Intelligent Toy Enhanced Learning*, pp. 114-118.

94 Lortz, S. L., (1979), "The Way of the Gamer: Dramatic Structure of RPGs", *Different Worlds*, Albany, Issue 2, pp. 32-35.

95 Goffman, E., (1959), *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Anchor Books, New York.

There are many types of role play games in Second Life<sup>96</sup> including; Bloodlines - a vampire RPG<sup>97</sup>, City of Lost Angels<sup>98</sup> - also a dark themed role play game with vampires, angels and demons which is probably the most durable role playing game in the world, Toxian City<sup>99</sup> - a dark urban RPG featuring vampires, werewolves, cybernetics and felines and Lutherson<sup>100</sup> which bills itself as "your interracial wonderland in Second Life" and which has a BDSM feel though it claims not to be such. Role playing games are so popular that there are systems for creating and effecting role play games in the world, for example Role Play System (RPS)<sup>101</sup>.

Boellstorff's *Coming of Age in Second Life*<sup>102</sup> is the most comprehensive ethnographic study of Second Life to date, but it only briefly touches on role play. When Boellstorff began his research in 2004 Second Life was just one year old<sup>103</sup>. It was a very different world then to the one in which I would begin my research in early 2008. Similar kinds of role play communities to the ones I write about here were present when Boellstorff was doing his research, but, for his own reasons, he did not research them in depth<sup>104</sup>. My study seeks to fill this gap.

Boellstorff reports community concern about role playing, with some characterising it as "...exhibiting an inauthentic self in a virtual context that expects authenticity"<sup>105</sup>. I find it odd that people would presume that on entering a virtual world, where one can present as anything one wishes, one would choose a representation that exactly matches one's meatspace self. Or that one might consider that a persona exhibited in a virtual world might be inauthentic. Such a persona might not be an exact duplicate of the person's meatspace persona, but it's an authentic something. T. L. Taylor describes virtual worlds as boundary spaces and describes the resident's relationship to 'real' as a shifting back and forth between fiction and reality<sup>106</sup>. Role play may well be a fiction, but so are many meatspace personas.

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96 Second Life Destination Guide, *Role-playing Communities*, <http://secondlife.com/destinations/roleplay>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

97 Liquid Designs, *Bloodlines*, <http://www.slbloodlines.com/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

98 Gamma Wave Games, *City of Lost Angels*, <http://ccs-gametech.com/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

99 Toxian City, *Toxian City Dark Urban Roleplay*, <http://www.toxiancity.com/>. Accessed 31/01/2014

100 City of Lutherson, *Lutherson*, <http://cityoflutherson.com/>. No longer online.

101 AeonVox, *RPS*, <http://www.bnjrps.com/>. No longer online.

102 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

103 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 52.

104 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 162.

105 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 184.

106 Taylor, T. L., (2009), *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 9-11.



Authenticity will feature heavily in this thesis, though mostly in a very different way to that expressed by Boellstorff's research subjects. In the role play communities I studied the quest for authenticity meant the desire to recreate as accurately as possible a representation of the culture they were attempting to inhabit. The communities would have meetings, that often went on for hours, that vociferously discussed what an authentic ancient Egyptian community would be like and how that might be implemented. This quest for authenticity really drove these communities. However just as everyone's conception of the meatspace reality we presently inhabit is different, every member of the community had a differing conception of life in ancient Egypt. Trying to bring a group of twenty first century Westerners to a consensus about the realities of life in ancient Egypt is a fabulously interesting, but not always fully successful thing.

There was also an interesting tension regarding authentic representations of self. It was my experience that everyone I encountered was absolutely aware that the avatar was not the person. That the gender, age, race etc. of the avatar was absolutely not guaranteed in any way to be the same as that of the human driving it. The tension was driven by the fact that we are still humans, heavily visual creatures, conditioned to relate to others based on their appearance, their movements, their shape. Despite being aware of this, as evidenced by frequent conversations about this topic, residents constantly found themselves relating to avatars as if they were the people they appeared to be and being delighted, disappointed, bewildered, shocked, amused, or, occasionally, angry, when a disparity was revealed.

The importance of researching role play communities is best expressed by Gary Alan Fine<sup>107</sup> who explains that, while all groups create culture of some kind, role players set out to develop a distinct cultural system and thus they are the group best suited to interactionist analysis. Following in the tradition of symbolic interactionists like Becker<sup>108</sup> and symbolic anthropologists like Edith Turner<sup>109</sup> Boellstorff's method was to study the world "in its own terms"<sup>110</sup>, making no attempt to meet his subjects in meatspace, nor to make any determination if they were who they presented as in Second Life.

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107 Fine, G. A., (2002), *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 229.

108 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York.

109 Goulet, J. (ed), Young, D. E. (ed), (1994), *Being Changed By Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

110 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 61.

For the research upon which this book is based I conducted my research entirely 'within' Second Life, as the avatar Tom Bukowski. I made no attempt to visit the offices of Linden Lab, the San Francisco-based company that owns and manages Second Life, or to meet Linden Lab staff, though I would sometimes interact with them at conferences, or within Second Life. I also made no attempt to meet Second Life residents in the actual world or learn their actual-world identities, though both happened on occasion. I took their activities and words as legitimate data about culture in a virtual world. For instance, if during my research I was talking to a woman, I was not concerned to determine if she was 'really' a man in the actual world, or even if two different people were taking turns controlling 'her'. Most Second Life residents meeting this woman would not know the answers to such questions, so for my ethnographic purposes it was important that I not know either.<sup>111</sup>

This is exactly the approach I have used. I have not sought out staff from Linden Lab for input into my research. Indeed my experience is that even if one wants to contact them, one is unlikely to receive any reply, even when you pay them. I once received a reply to a support request two years after I submitted it. It was not my intention to study how or why people are different in virtual worlds than there are in meatspace. Nor was it my intention to establish a hierarchy of realities, with some more real than others. Neither did I enquire if people were really the gender they presented as. I don't do this when I meet people in meatspace and it seemed just as rude in Second Life. Sometimes I did get to know the gender and age of an avatar's meatspace self, but still in a technologically mediated manner; internet, phone, other online spaces. I have met none of the people I met in Second Life in meatspace. My aim is to examine the authenticity of digital selves in and of themselves. This quest for an authentic report of what I found in these communities is also the reason I did not base my research on interviews. Rather, I rely for my data on the logs of the actual events as they happened. My aim here is to avoid the problem which Fine<sup>112</sup> expresses as the question, "Do psychoanalysts study dreams or reports of dreams?", to avoid the inevitable filtering and self censoring that occurs with interviews, especially if some time has elapsed between the events and the interview.

We all hide things from others, both in meatspace and cyberspace. We hide from our friends and families, from our lovers, and even from ourselves. It is the things that we hide that define our selves. They are the things no one else but us knows, the things that will be extinguished with us when we die. We even hide things from our avatars, but less so than we do from other humans.

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111 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 61.

112 Fine, G. A., (2002), *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 230.



Avatars have their own secrets. Things they do that our meatspace self would never do, could never do. Avatars are embodiments of what Jung<sup>113</sup> calls our shadow self, the self we think we can't or shouldn't be.

Though there have been some issues about internet protocol (IP) address discoverability<sup>114 115 116</sup>, it is, for all practical purposes, impossible to reliably establish the meatspace identity of another resident. Even if an IP address can be traced, an IP address is not a person<sup>117 118</sup>. There is therefore a high level of perceived anonymity in Second Life. That is to say that residents believe and behave as if it were not possible for any other resident to discover their meatspace identity. Indeed nearly half of all internet users believe it is possible to be completely anonymous anywhere on the internet<sup>119</sup>. In Second Life there is a strong social taboo that if a resident has not posted any information in the section of their profile set aside for information about their meatspace identity then it is just not done to ask them about it, and one should expect a brusque rebuff if one does so. People want to be anonymous in Second Life. In the same way that Anderson, in his classic study of 1920s Hobos, finds that hobos value, as he puts it "...the freedom and security that only the crowded city offers"<sup>120</sup> the denizens of Second Life treasure their anonymity. They want to be secret deviants<sup>121</sup>, to engage in rule breaking behavior and yet to not be perceived as deviant. They are rejecting rules imposed on them by the moral entrepreneurs of their meatspace communities. They are Pagans who live in the bible belt of the US. They are Iranians who want to meet Jews as people. They are parents who want to be children and 'liberated' women who want to be slaves.

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113 Abrams, J. (ed), Zweig, C. (ed), (1991), "Introduction" in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, Tarcher, New York.

114 Second Life JIRA (ARVD-38), *RedZone Security violates TOS, exposes private information and is being misused*, <https://jira.secondlife.com/browse/ARVD-38>, Accessed 26/01/2014.

115 Second Life JIRA (VWR-17044), *Add options to selectively limit media sources to limit IP discoverability*, <https://jira.secondlife.com/browse/VWR-17044>, Accessed 26/01/2014.

116 Second Life JIRA (VWR-17812), *Prompt before contacting non-Linden server, including shared media, streaming media, and streaming music*, <https://jira.secondlife.com/browse/VWR-17812>, Accessed 26/01/2014.

117 Raul, (2013), *California Judge Moskowitz finds that an IP address, alone, is insufficient evidence to support a copyright infringement complaint*, <http://fightcopyrightrtrolls.com/2013/02/18/california-judge-moskowitz-finds-that-an-ip-address-alone-is-insufficient-evidence-to-support-a-copyright-infringement-complaint/>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

118 Cushing, T., (2013), *Yet Another Court Says IP Addresses Are Not Enough To Positively Identify Infringers*, <https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20130218/21462222020/yet-another-court-says-ip-addresses-are-not-enough-to-positively-identify-infringers.shtml>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

119 Rainie, L., Kiesler, S., Kang, R., Madden, M., (2013), *Anonymity, Privacy, and Security Online*, Pew Research Center, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Anonymity-online/Summary-of-Findings.aspx?view=all>, Accessed 23/02/2014.

120 Anderson, N., (1923), *Hobo*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 5.

121 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York, p. 20.

# Representations Of The World

Residents of the communities I studied felt subject to deviant labeling, and not only if they were members of communities in the world which were seriously at deviance from meatspace norms. Spending time in virtual worlds at all still has a stigma attached to it. A game like *The Sims*, where one is compelled to repeatedly enact a limited number of options in order to vicariously live the life of a character in a very shallow world attracts only scant derision, and is in fact lauded as one the most popular games ever<sup>122</sup>, but abiding in *Second Life*, a rich, deep world where the user controls almost every aspect of the world and can be or do anything attracts constant streams of derision, usually along the lines of "get a real life".

This stereotype has been milked and propagated by journalists who spend the minimum possible time in the world, sometimes none, to write a story, and who invariably write about disturbed relationships, porn and the perceived emptiness of *Second Life*<sup>123 124</sup>.

It has been well demonstrated that media usually sensationally portray subcultural spaces as deviant while promoting "...an ideologically dominant status quo"<sup>125</sup>. Commercial documentaries and mainstream media reports of *Second Life* invariably focus on the most maladjusted individuals they can find in the world and then portray them as exemplars of the greater community. *Life 2.0*<sup>126</sup> is a particularly egregious example, which contains stories about an adulterous relationship, a deeply troubled young man recovering from abuse, and a woman who makes her living in the world. Even the woman who makes her living as a successful builder is made to look as if she is somehow delusional because her avatar is a thinner version of her rather rotund meatspace self.

CBC's *Strangers in Paradise*<sup>127</sup> is the story of an adulterous man who has affairs with two women in the world and is purely sensationalist. The documentary "When Strangers Click"<sup>128</sup> gives a glimmer of hope. This movie tells five stories of couples meeting in *Second Life* and provides a more

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122 Wikipedia, *List of Best-Selling PC Games*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Best-Selling\\_PC\\_Video\\_Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Best-Selling_PC_Video_Games). Accessed 26/01/2014.

123 Pirillo, C., (2010), *Why Didn't Second Life Become a Hit?*, <http://chris.pirillo.com/why-didnt-second-life-become-a-hit/>. Accessed 26/01/2014.

124 Stein, J. (2006), *My So-Called Second Life*, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570827,00.html>. Accessed 26/01/2014.

125 Richardson, J. T., (1996), "Journalistic Bias Toward New Religious Movements in Australia", *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 289-290.

126 *Life 2 Film*, *Life 2.0: Virtual World, New Reality*, <http://life2movie.com/>. Accessed 26/01/2014.

127 CBC, *Strangers in Paradise*, [http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/2008-2009/strangers\\_in\\_paradise/video.html](http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/2008-2009/strangers_in_paradise/video.html). No longer online.

128 HBO, *When Strangers Click*, [http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/when-strangers-click#](http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/when-strangers-click#/)/. Accessed 26/01/2014.

nuanced view of the world. However it still only examines the topic of relationships and spends most of its time on a failed adulterous relationship which is portrayed in a very melodramatic manner.

The ABC's Four Corners 2007 documentary "You Only Live Twice"<sup>129</sup> is perhaps the best of the media reports on the world. Though it too discusses the same old topics; identity play, virtual sex, corporations, but nothing about community. The media's fascination with lurid topics, usually virtual sex, is indicative of a lack of depth in their reporting. It takes a lot of time to get to know Second Life, mostly because the inworld search is so poor as to be almost completely useless, but also because of the nature of community there. Members of the media have simply not spent the time required to get to know the culture(s) of Second Life. This study will delve into the cultures of both Second Life as a whole, and of the first community I studied in particular, and seek to make them explicable to those of you who have not yet known the worlds of Second Life.

The most accurate portrayals of the world are made by those who live there. Virtual worlds are not a spectator sport. You had to be there. If time is a currency, as postulated by Harlan Ellison in his "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman"<sup>130</sup>, residents of Second Life are big spenders. Many, many hours are required to grok the virtually real. In a society with a fast cut, shallow depth, lurid detail, mediascape the choice to go for long, slow experiences may at first seem an unlikely one. Probably it is a reaction against the pace of information insertion we experience today. Maybe it's generational. The average age of a Second Life is 33 and nearly a third are over 35<sup>131</sup> after all.

The most interesting of all the documentaries on the world is made by a resident. The series, made in and about the world, is entitled Molotov Alva and his Search for The Creator: A Second Life Odyssey<sup>132</sup>. In this ten part series of five minute movies shot entirely in the world<sup>133</sup>, Douglas Gayeton takes us on a journey to follow Molotov Alva on a journey of self discovery in Second Life, on a quest to seek the creator. Along the way Molotov philosophically compares virtual life with meatspace life. He explores the issues of identity creation, having less sensory input, simulations' dependence on the things they simulate, the inauthenticity of modern life - fake leather, non dairy creamer - commenting on how many things in the meatspace world are made to resemble something else, and on the coming of the corporations

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129 ABC, *You Only Live Twice*,  
[http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/special\\_ed/20070319/default\\_full.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/special_ed/20070319/default_full.htm). Accessed 26/01/2014.

130 Ellison, H., (1966), "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman", *Galaxy Bookshelf*, Galaxy Publishing, New York, p. 163.

131 Reinhart, R., (2007), *Making Sense of Second Life Demographics*,  
<http://www.hatesomethingchangesomething.com/making-sense-of-second-life-demographics/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

132 Gayeton, D., *Molotov Alva and his Search for The Creator: A Second Life Odyssey*,  
<http://molotovalva.submarine.nl>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

133 This type of movie, shot in virtual or game worlds, are collectively known as machinima.

to the world. He explains grieving as the cathartic release of those who discover themselves in a virtual world, where anything is possible, where one can have anything, be anything, and yet who still find themselves filled with a deep, gnawing emptiness. He considers how the geographical mobility of 21<sup>st</sup> century meatspace lives often creates friendships and families that rely on technology, phones and email especially, for their continuance. Molotov describes being in the world as an experiment in self actualization, noting how being there enables people to create themselves anew, to create the world as they wish it to be, and thus to live lives in times and places best suited to their natures, instead of cramming them into the shape of the consensus reality of twenty first century life. He eventually discovers that there is no one creator, that everyone can be a creator, can shape their virtual world, their virtual selves, as they wish. This observation is central to life in Second Life. People are there to take control of their lives, to be free, to be their own persons, to shape themselves as they wish, regardless of the physical circumstances, social conventions, moral ideals and laws they find themselves surrounded with in meatspace. They are shaping their meatspace lives by doing so. A virtual life is not something lost from one's meatspace life, it is an addition to it. It is therefore ironic that being in the world is often decried as a waste of time, as not real, as deviant, as a problem when it is in fact a solution.

The charming and amusing *Man vs. Second Life*<sup>134</sup> is another resident made film which incisively comments on being in the world. Made in the guise of a survival guide, *Our Hero* sets out to survive Second Life. In less than nine minutes the maker, Hugity, provides more insight into being in the world than any of the commercial films. With a delicious ironic touch Hugity mercilessly satirizes the world and its portrayers. What makes this piece more compelling is that it does what Molotov Alva did: It uses role play to convey its meaning. Hugity's character plays the role of an insider commenting on newcomers, known as 'noobs'. He dispenses advice on how to spot and avoid noobs while along the way revealing his own noobness. His subtlety is such that actual noobs, or those who have never ventured into the world at all, will most likely not discern the rich levels of cultural commentary in the film. In this thesis I shall endeavor to elucidate this culture so that it is deciphered for those who have not experienced it first hand.

The way I will try to do this is to convey to you what happened to me. To try to help you to understand this strange land in which you probably haven't lived. To this end I will use what Clifford Geertz<sup>135</sup> calls thick description. Through the course of this thesis I will try to take you on the same journey that I took, although your journey will be greatly compressed in time compared to mine, and thus necessarily greatly compressed in experience. But I will try to lead you through that journey, in a way that unpacks the reality for you, explains the jargon for you, lifts the veil that necessarily now lingers over your

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134 Baumgaertner, H., Krueger, S., McGirr, J., *Man vs. Second Life*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFS4l5B547s>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

135 Geertz, C., (1973), "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York, pp. 3-30.

conceptualisation of what it is to be a resident of the virtual. For this reason the majority of this thesis will take the form of a chronologically ordered retelling of my experiences in the world.

I am telling you the story of how the world became real to me. When I first entered the world it was a strange and amazing place. I accordingly began as an outside observer. But this is a limited position. To understand a thing one must become the thing. Anything less is the uninformed opinion of an interested passer by. In order to commence becoming the thing one must take it seriously. One cannot maintain a position that one is "immune from unreason" as Evans-Pritchard put it in regards to his work with the Zande<sup>136</sup>. I have immersed myself in, and here reveal to you, the particular kind of madness that it is to be a resident of Second Life.

## Ethics In The World

While I had no illusions that I would be in any way different from the other members of the community, this was directly at odds with the view of the ethics committee. It was their view that as an academic I was in some kind of position of superiority in relation to the other members of the community. When I enquired about this they replied that it was because I would be publishing information about the communities, revealing their souls as it were. The truth turned out to be quite different. I was restrained by the requirements of the ethics committee in ways other community members were not. Although I was bound by the constraints of the ethics committee, most particularly that I allow any participants to withdraw from the study at any time and not include them in any published work, other avatars were free to, and indeed routinely did, publish incredibly intimate and detailed information on websites, forums and social media without any consent, and in fact in breach of the Terms of Service of Second Life. Indeed one person did withdraw their consent very late in the course of my research. For this reason this thesis covers only one of the two communities I studied as the person who withdrew consent in the second community was such a key member of that community that I found it impossible to write about it at all while having to exclude that person from my writing.

At first the ethics committee sought to have me obtain gatekeeper consent from Linden Lab for my research. This is like asking an internet service provider to consent to one's research into the activities of someone whose website they host. At the time I began my research Linden Lab explicitly stated they they were not in any position to give such consent, and would not do so. The ethics committee then asked that I obtain gatekeeper approval from the owner of the sims, which I did. The issue of identity presented a difficulty here. The committee had requested that I obtain consent for each person in their "real name" and that I verify their identity. Then the question

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<sup>136</sup> Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 10.

arises of what their real name constitutes? I am only, specifically and deliberately, studying the avatar in the world of Second Life, not the meatspace person in meatspace. In this case the "real name" is the avatar's name. I advised the ethics committee that it was against the Terms of Service of Second Life to disclose an avatar's meatspace identity without their consent, and that many avatars did not want their meatspace self to be known to be connected with their avatar self, but that they were more than willing to participate in the research under their avatar's name. Accordingly it was decided that I obtain consent inworld in the name of the avatar. This was done by providing each avatar with an information sheet and a consent form in the form of a notecard (a file that contains text and can be stored in one's inworld inventory and displayed on the screen) and then having a direct conversation with the avatar and logging it to record their consent.

The ethics committee asked that I anonymise the names of the communities and of all the members of them. I found this was against the wishes of the residents of the community. Every one of them wanted their actual avatar's name to be used, and demanded to know how it was that the ethics committee could impose restrictions on them that they did not wish imposed. They resented the fact that the ethics committee was making decisions for them, felt it as an imposition. As I remain bound by the conditions of the ethics committee I have anonymised the community name and all avatar names.

The ethics committee initially insisted that a fundamental feature of the world be removed because of its privacy implications. The feature in question being the ability to move one's view independent of one's avatar. This means that one can, for example, look inside buildings from a remote position. This ability caused considerable consternation for the ethics committee when they were reviewing my project. The committee, being completely innocent of any knowledge of what a virtual world was, asked for a demonstration. I took them into the world and demonstrated many features of it for them. When they discovered that one may look anywhere in the world, and that thus there is no actual privacy, they stridently demanded that this feature must be removed or it would be impossible for them to grant approval. They also wanted me to have a sign permanently over my head alerting everyone that my avatar was doing research. I pointed out to them that the movable camera was an unchangeable feature of the world, and that wearing a sign over my head was in breach of the sim rules, and they reluctantly relented. I had to revise my proposal ten times before they came to terms with the realities of the world however.

For me the reality was that I was just another member of the community. Unless I was to be this I could not undertake effective research. As Jeanne Favret-Saada has argued in her study of witchcraft in rural France, to come into a community and not take it seriously is to begin with an academic conceit of superiority<sup>137</sup>. She feels, as I do, that unless one participates equally

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137 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 11-12.

in a world and allows the world to become real for one, one remains unable to understand it, "For those that haven't been caught (bewitched) spells don't exist"<sup>138</sup> It is the same in the world of Second Life. If one hasn't had the experience of making a connection with one's avatar, of realising it as a part of oneself, it isn't real. Favret-Saada argues that the price of this is that you "cannot verify any assertion" because there are no impartial witnesses<sup>139</sup>. I argue, with her<sup>140</sup>, that (outside of omniscience) there is no such thing as objective veracity and that it is not possible to remain outside a thing sufficiently to maintain objectivity and still be able to say anything useful about it. There is no objective reality knowable in human experience. To make an objective assessment of anything one would need both to be omniscient, and to be able to be sure that one was so. As Favret-Saada says, it is "absurd to continue to posit a neutral position"<sup>141</sup>. One must become the thing, for there "is no other solution but to practice it oneself, to become one's own informant, to penetrate one's own amnesia, and to try to make explicit what one finds unstatable in oneself."<sup>142</sup> Favret-Saada recalls that her education as an ethnographer had tried to teach her that one must above all avoid two things, "that of agreeing to 'participate' in the native discourse, and that of succumbing to the temptations of subjectivism. Not only could I not possibly avoid them; it was by means of them that I was able to work out most of my ethnographic work."<sup>143</sup> I could not agree more with her. I enthusiastically participated in the native discourse of Second Life, but in this case the native and the researcher are one and the same. If, as Malinowski says we must "grasp the native's point of view"<sup>144</sup> then what I here set out to do is to reveal to you my point of view as a resident of Second Life. Moreover I shall argue that subjective experience is a collection of one's perceptions and that, similarly to Humphrey's argument that perception is the basis of consciousness<sup>145</sup> I shall argue that perception is reality.

## Being In The World

Some of the people in my study spent as much as seventy hours a week in the world. Many refuse to tell others how much time they spend in the world, or even that they spend any time there. But amongst ourselves we have a shared

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138 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 15.

139 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 20.

140 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 21.

141 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 12.

142 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 22.

143 Favret-Saada, J., (1980), *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 23.

144 Malinowski, B., (1922), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, E. P. Dutton & Co, New York, p. 25.

145 Humphrey, N., (1992), *A History of the Mind: Evolution and the Birth of Consciousness*, Simon & Schuster, New York.



sense of identity as residents of a virtual world, what Becker<sup>146</sup> would call a shared deviant identity. We are aware that we are part of a shared subcultural space and we gain support and a sense of strength from those others who share that space with us.

Residents see Second Life as a separate world to the meatspace one. The philosophical distinctions made by authors like Malpas do not resonate with residents. Residents want it to be separate because they are choosing it instead of meatspace. They are choosing to move into a world where perceived agency is increased, where fun is prioritized and physical violence is impossible. It is unsurprising then that it is a prevalent attitude that the fun will be destroyed if the connection to a meatspace identity is made. However, because of the high hardware requirements of the Second Life client software<sup>147 148</sup>, and on account of the instability of communication channels in the world many residents of Second Life use Facebook to communicate. During May 2011 Facebook began deleting, without warning, accounts in the names of Second Life avatars<sup>149 150</sup> citing their policy that only 'real names' must be used for Facebook accounts. This resulted in a barrage of complaints to both Facebook and Linden Lab<sup>151</sup>. Linden Lab had, and continues to, promote Facebook as a way of obtaining information about Second Life<sup>152</sup>. Residents complained that they did not want to associate their Second Life avatar name with that of their meatspace identity; "Under no circumstances (sic) do I want to share my RL name with anyone who doesn't already know me by that name in RL"<sup>153</sup>, "In this case, LL are suggesting that we provide a third party with both our RL information and our SL account data, which is

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146 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York, p. 38.

147 Sanchez, J., (2009), "Barriers to Student Learning in Second Life", *Library Technology Reports*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 29-34.

148 Lee, C. Y., Warren, M., (2007), "Security Issues within Virtual Worlds such as Second Life", *Proceedings of 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Information Security Management Conference*, Edith Cowan University, Perth, p. 144, <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ism/44/>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

149 Second Life Forum, (2011), *Deletion Of Hundreds Of Second Life Facebook Accounts Being Reported Today*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/General-Discussion-Forum/Deletion-Of-Hundreds-Of-Second-Life-Facebook-Accounts-Being/td-p/884697>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

150 Randall, K., (2011), *Facebook Deletes Thousands Of Second Life Avatar Profiles Without Warning*, <http://www.kimrandall.me/facebook-deletes-thousands-of-second-life-avatar-profiles-without-warning/>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

151 Second Life Forum, (2011), *Facebook deleting Secondlife Avatars ????*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Forums-Blogs-Answers-and/Facebook-deleting-Secondlife-Avatars/td-p/887663>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

152 Linden, A., (2011), *Improving our Lines of Communication with the Community*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Featured-News/Improving-our-Lines-of-Communication-with-the-Community/ba-p/675118>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

153 Second Life Forum, (2011), *Deletion Of Hundreds Of Second Life Facebook Accounts Being Reported Today*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/General-Discussion-Forum/Deletion-Of-Hundreds-Of-Second-Life-Facebook-Accounts-Being/td-p/884697/page/2>, Accessed 31/01/2014.



completely unacceptable"<sup>154</sup>, "I am unwilling to acquiesce to their demand to link my SL identity to my RL identity for the whole world to see and for them to exploit monetarily"<sup>155</sup>.

The actions of Facebook in deleting avatar accounts was a precursor to Google's Nymwars<sup>156</sup>, which began in July of 2011, in which Google began deleting Google+ accounts that they felt were not held in 'real names'<sup>157 158</sup>. This sparked a huge online debate<sup>159 160 161 162 163 164 165</sup>, with Electronic Frontiers making the case for pseudonyms<sup>166</sup> and with Google eventually relenting, perhaps realising the magnitude of its misjudgment of how people identify themselves online, and if and how they choose to make connections between online and meatspace identities, and allowing pseudonyms<sup>167 168</sup>. Sadly, they later unrelented and once again insisted on a 'real name', which they then used to facilitate their shared endorsements advertising program,

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154 Second Life Forum, (2011), *Deletion Of Hundreds Of Second Life Facebook Accounts Being Reported Today*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/General-Discussion-Forum/Deletion-Of-Hundreds-Of-Second-Life-Facebook-Accounts-Being-reported/td-p/884697/page/4>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

155 Au, W. J., (2011), *Facebook Reportedly Deleting Many Second Life Avatar Profiles; Linden Recommends Facebook Pages Instead*, <http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2011/05/facebook-deleting-second-life-avatar-profiles.html>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

156 Wikipedia, Nymwars, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nymwars>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

157 Pfanner, E., (2011), *Naming Names on the Internet*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/05/technology/naming-names-on-the-internet.html>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

158 Carmody, T., (2011), *Google+ Identity Crisis: What's at Stake With Real Names and Privacy*, <http://www.wired.com/business/2011/07/google-plus-user-names/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

159 Galperin, E., (2011), *2011 in Review: Nymwars*, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/12/2011-review-nymwars>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

160 Madrigal, A. C., (2011), *Why Facebook and Google's Concept of 'Real Names' Is Revolutionary*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/08/why-facebook-and-googles-concept-of-real-names-is-revolutionary/243171/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

161 Marks, K., (2011), *Google Plus must stop this Identity Theatre*, <http://epeus.blogspot.com.au/2011/08/google-plus-must-stop-this-identity.html>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

162 Stilgherrian, (2011), *Google's real names a real disaster*, <http://www.zdnet.com/googles-real-names-a-real-disaster-1339321277/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

163 Bayley, A. S., (2011), *Google+ names policy, explained*, <http://infotrope.net/2011/08/04/google-plus-names-policy-explained/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

164 Parr, B., (2011), *Google Responds to Google+ Account Suspension Controversy*, <http://mashable.com/2011/07/26/google-plus-common-names/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

165 Zawinski, J., (2011), *Nym Wars*, <http://www.jwz.org/blog/2011/08/nym-wars/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

166 York, J. C., (2011), *A Case for Pseudonyms*, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/07/case-pseudonyms>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

167 Galperin, E., York, J. C., (2011), *Victory! Google Surrenders in the Nymwars*, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/10/victory-google-surrenders-nymwars>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

168 Parr, B., (2011), *Google+ to Support Pseudonyms*, <http://mashable.com/2011/10/19/google-to-support-pseudonyms/>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

once again meeting with much user resistance and also inadvertently mobilising users to share their workarounds to avoid participation in such advertising campaigns with each other<sup>169</sup>.

In a meta echo of their desire to protect their avatar names from being connected to their meatspace names residents also desire to maintain the integrity of the characters they create to role play with those avatars. When one enters a role play community one creates a character for the avatar to play, in my case a priest of Osiris. In these communities there is a series of presentations of selves going on, serial selves. The character the resident creates for the avatar to play is an intentional performance. One sets out to perform a particular self via one's avatar. In this case, a particular Egyptian themed self. This self is informed by the self that is the everyday performance of the human actor in meatspace, which, from my own theological viewpoint, is informed by one's non material higher spiritual self, which is the self that is that being that has many serial incarnations in the physical world. From this perspective, our physical manifestations are like the avatars of a virtual world, having been created by our higher self to allow it to play in the meatspace world. In turn, our physically manifest self, informed by the higher self, creates the character that we play in our lives here. These serial selves allow a wealth of opportunities to experience selves in a way not possible outside virtual worlds. They allow us to look at things we regard as part of ourselves at one remove. We see the avatar, or the avatar's character, doing things in a way that is impossible for us to see our meatspace bodies doing things. It allows us to view ourselves as the other. As such, it is a wonderful opportunity to learn about all our selves.

The presentation our avatars give is informed by both our meatspace front stage and back stage selves, to use Goffman's concept<sup>170</sup>. We develop an intimate connection with our avatars very quickly, especially if they are modeled on our ideal self<sup>171</sup>, we even develop a sense of personal space for our avatar<sup>172</sup>. This close attachment allows parts of our back stage self to be performed in the avatar. Then we have the avatar play a character in a role play community. The resulting performance, a mix of our character's intended performance and our meatspace selves filtered into our avatar, is then performed back to us by means of the performance the avatar gives us as we watch it in the virtual world. In turn our meatspace self is likewise observed by our higher self. It is interesting to note that reports of a person's astral self

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169 Chacos, B., (2011), *How to keep your real name and face out of Google's ads*, <http://www.pcworld.com/article/2053357/how-to-keep-your-real-name-and-face-out-of-googles-ads.html>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

170 Goffman, E., (1959), *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Anchor Books, New York.

171 Seung-A, A., J., (2012), "I Feel More Connected to the Physically Ideal Mini Me than the Mirror-Image Mini Me: Theoretical Implications of the Malleable Self for Speculations on the Effects of Avatar Creation on Avatar Self Connection in Wii", *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, Vol. 13, No. 5, pp. 567-570.

172 Wolfendale, J., (2007), "My Avatar My Self: Virtual Harm and Attachment", *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 9, p. 114.

often place the viewpoint of that self as slightly above and behind the viewpoint of the meatspace self<sup>173</sup>. This is likewise the usual position from which we view our avatar in a virtual world.

But there is noise in the signal of these performances. The avatar, for a variety of reasons, both technical and psychological, does not perform back to us exactly what we intend it to. Avatars are to us as Roy Batty (the replicant in *Blade Runner*), is to the *Blade Runner* Deckard, when he tries to explain himself saying "If only you could have seen what I've seen with your eyes"<sup>174</sup>. Batty is a creation who doesn't turn out as expected. He has become something more. In the world our avatars are the same. Technologically the noise is generated because the hardware and software presently in use allows us a very limited range of control over the avatar. Facial expressions are especially limited, the importance of which in primate society can not be underestimated. Also such things as network lag can cause the avatar to seem to, for example, walk on through the world even when we have lost control over it. Psychologically the noise derives from our incomplete awareness of our selves. We inject aspects of ourselves of which we are only subliminally aware into the avatar, and these are performed back to us by it. It is not uncommon in the world for residents to say the avatar has a life of its own. Sometimes when talking to an avatar it will begin a remark with "My typist says...", meaning the human behind the avatar says the thing. I suggest that the things avatars do that we consider their own life are rather performances of unrecognised aspects of the meatspace self. The injection of noise and the unrecognised aspects of our meatspace selves become a part of the performance we experience back from the avatar. This final performance, the cumulative result of our higher self, our back stage and front stage meatspace selves, our avatar self, our intended character's self, and an injection of noise, is assimilated back into our meatspace self, and, in turn, back into our higher self, the actor whose avatar we in the meatspace world are. Avatars are the other that is ourselves. They are incarnations that are concurrent with our physical one. Parallel rather than serial incarnations. As parallel connections allow greater bandwidth than serial ones avatars thus represent an increased opportunity to know our selves.

In role play communities one spends a great deal of time and effort in developing one's character. One does not wish the bubble to be burst. This is one reason why in both of the communities I studied, despite the availability of voice communications, text was the medium of choice. In fact both communities had a rule that voice communications were not to be used. Passing one's self off as an ancient Egyptian priest is a lot harder if one's Australian or American or British accent is revealed. Likewise maintaining a

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173 Muldoon, S., Carrington, H., (1981), *The Projection of the Astral Body*, Weiser, York Beach.

174 Wikipedia, *List of Blade Runner characters*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Blade\\_Runner\\_characters#Roy\\_Batty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Blade_Runner_characters#Roy_Batty). Accessed 31/01/2014.

character of a different sex to one's meatspace self. All this adds up to the fact that role play communities are treated by their inhabitants as their own context. This is the main reason for my choice to study them as such.

Role play is not about victory, "...the 'game' revolves not around winning, but around the social relations and social interactions between the characters"<sup>175</sup>. This interplay, this remixing, is what creates the culture. It is the way in which the truths of the community are decided. Sometimes these truths are not what the community sets out to create or portray. Sometimes they arise, unbidden, from the spontaneous interactions of the characters. Once revealed in the role play, they cannot be taken back. Though sometimes people try.

While most role players and role play communities are not enacting activities that would be seriously immoral or illegal in meatspace, some are. Gorean communities, based on the culture of the Gor series of books by John Lange Norman, were some of the earliest role play communities in Second Life<sup>176</sup>. These communities graphically enact the misogynist, BDSM and slavery aspects of the Gor books, often extremely graphically. There is a thriving business in avatar skins designed to make one's avatar look as if it has been beaten. Likewise Furry communities, where humans present as animal or human/animal hybrid avatars, and which also tend to BDSM activities, were also early and resilient role play communities. Both of these communities continued to be a strong presence in Second Life for the entire period of my research, and both types came under fire from those not a part of them, both for the BDSM elements of their cultures, and the Goreans for their non politically correct attitude towards women. The first community I studied was built by people who had previously inhabited a Gorean community, and this resulted in many popular activities and attitudes from Gor being present in that community, albeit having been formed into an ostensibly Egyptian mold. The second community I studied, being built from the ruins of the first, was populated mainly by those persons from the first community who rejected the Gor elements present there.

The creation of these sub cultural spaces is an exemplar of the power of highly connected societies to reshape themselves. The internet is the ultimate example of an enabler of a "...process by which people are emancipated from the controls of society and become responsible to those of a smaller group"<sup>177</sup>. It is not that residents of virtual worlds are all in some way special as transgressors of meatspace rules. In fact humans have never all lived by the rules. At this time in history our ability to collect and analyse massive amounts of data is making it possible for the powers that be to notice the extent of the non compliance. This is perhaps the reason countless millions sign up to online services with corporations that specify draconian terms of service,

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175 Schaap, F., (2002), *The Words that Took Us There: Ethnography in a Virtual Reality*, Aksant Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, p. 2.

176 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 163.

177 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York, p. 60.

often contrary to law, because it is possible to feel one can get away with breaking the rules, a process that it turn weakens the rule of law<sup>178</sup>. The rules have become so numerous (how many people read every 'terms of service agreement' for every website they sign up to?) and so unlikely to be enforced<sup>179</sup> that they are routinely ignored<sup>180</sup>.

If there are only half a dozen people on the planet who juggle geese for fun then, no matter how severe their geographical dispersion, the internet makes it easy for them to find each other. Once they do find each other a process of social cohesion occurs which normalizes, for them, their activities. In their solidarity they come to see conventional conceptions of their activity as the poorly informed conceptualizations of an other from which they choose to dissociate themselves<sup>181</sup>. This is happening today to an extent not previously seen in human societies. One's anonymity, or perceived anonymity, on the internet has enabled an acceleration of this phenomenon. Becker states that, "To understand the behavior of someone who is a member of such a group it is necessary to understand that way of life"<sup>182</sup> and so this study is presented in order that those who have not experienced this particular way of life may gain understanding of this phenomenon through the lens of a microcosmic example. The communities I participated in are a microcosm of a microcosm. For there is not one culture of Second Life. There are as many as there are sims. Of course there are elements of these cultures which all residents share, artifacts of using the same software client, the same kind of avatar, through the same type of technological facilities. But essentially I am here explicating a recursive set of cultures and selves, the sim's culture drawing on the wider culture of Second Life, this, in turn, drawing on the various meatspace cultures of the residents, whose selves are likewise informed by the various manifest (meatspace) and non manifest (higher self and avatar and avatar's character) selves that form the complete person.

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178 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

179 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, p. 2, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

180 Lemley, M., A., (2006), "Terms of Use", *Minnesota Law Review*, Vol. 91, Issue 2.

181 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York, p. 78.

182 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York, p. 79.

# Free Culture: Libre And Gratis

We come from a tradition of 'free culture' - not 'free' as in 'free beer' (to borrow a phrase from the founder of the free-software movement, but 'free' as in 'free speech', 'free markets', 'free trade', 'free enterprise', 'free will', and 'free elections'. A free culture supports and protects creators and innovators. It does this directly by granting intellectual property rights. But it does so indirectly by limiting the reach of those rights, to guarantee that follow-on creators and innovators remain as free as possible from the control of the past. A free culture is not a culture without property, just as a free market is not a market in which everything is free. The opposite of a free culture is a 'permission culture' - a culture in which creators get to create only with the permission of the powerful, or of creators from the past.<sup>183</sup>

An essential part of a free culture is the ability to build on what came before, "Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to [puny] dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature."<sup>184</sup>. In this way we contemporary people know and build on the work of our predecessors, just as, and I shall demonstrate this later in this thesis, the ancient Egyptians remixed their rituals, and even their gods, into new combined forms based on earlier constructs. But today this process is being challenged by corporations who seek to own culture, to prevent the remix, and they are using copyright law to do so.

We remix everything. This is what Ferguson argues on his eponymous site, Everything is A Remix<sup>185</sup>. One example Ferguson provides is that of Star Wars. He relates how the story of Star Wars was constructed by George Lucas under the direction of Joseph Campbell. The story is based on Campbell's concept of the monomyth<sup>186</sup>, which sees all myths as remixes on a basic framework. Having a similar method of construction to the Egyptian books of the dead, Campbell's monomyth contains seventeen possible scenes, but not all myths contain all scenes. Each myth is a different remix. Some of these monomyth scenes are incorporated into Star Wars; call to adventure - Luke sees Leia's message, supernatural aid - the arrival of Obi Wan, the belly of the whale - caught in the trash compactor, the road of trials - Luke sets off in the Millennium Falcon, and the meeting with the goddess - Luke meets Leia,

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183 Lessig, L., (2004), *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, p. 4, [http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free\\_culture.lawrence\\_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf](http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free_culture.lawrence_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf), Accessed 18/12/2013.

184 Salisbury, J., (1159). *The Metalogicon*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 167.

185 Ferguson, K., (NDP), *Everything is a Remix*, <http://everythingisaremix.info/watch-the-series>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

186 Campbell, J., (2008), *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, New World Library, Novato, pp. 1-40.



among others. Apart from the story Ferguson shows the many close parallels that exist between Star Wars and other famous movies, including; Flash Gordon, Seven Samurai, Metropolis, Yojimbo and The Searchers<sup>187</sup>. Quite simply put, humans prefer the familiar so we love remixes.

Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig argues that culture is a remix<sup>188</sup>. The entirety of human history has been a process of remixing the knowledge and stories of those who came before us and combining it in new ways to form a new understanding. We tell the stories of our forebears, but we embellish and extend and edit them. By trying to prevent us from remixing, from telling our stories, contemporary corporations are seeking to prevent the development of culture. Attempts to prevent users sharing stories were evident in the world. Berenike was a refugee from a sim themed on Frank Hebert's Dune series, which had been shut down by the present owners of the copyright on Herbert's work<sup>189</sup>. Another member of the community came to us freshly evicted from a Firefly themed sim likewise shut down. CBS forced a Star Trek themed sim to close<sup>190</sup>, and several Battlestar Galactica themed sims were shut down<sup>191</sup> although in this case the copyright holders later relented on the condition that no Battlestar Galactica themed items were to be sold in the Marketplace<sup>192</sup>.

The result of these actions was that some sims were closed but new ones sprung up just as quickly as the old were closed. Sometimes minor changes to the names were made and in others nothing was changed. Some remain to this day, never having been located by those who would close them. This demonstrates one property of the internet age, things can be created or moved very quickly. New sims, new websites, new IRC channels, new remixes can be put up much faster than existing mechanisms for controlling copyright can find and remove them. This is the best reason why copyright reform should be effected. Existing copyright laws are both unenforceable and based on assumptions which are no longer true. They presume that information is centrally produced and that creative endeavors are motivated solely by monetary considerations<sup>193</sup>. The growth of a distributed, remix culture, and of

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187 Ferguson, K., (NDP), *Everything is a Remix*, <http://everythingisaremix.info/watch-the-series>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

188 Lessig, L., (2008), *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, <https://archive.org/details/LawrenceLessigRemix>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

189 Au, W. J., (2009), *Enforcers of Dune: Frank Herbert Estate Targets Dune Roleplayers In Second Life*, <http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2009/04/enforcers-of-dune.html>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

190 Shuftan, B., (2012), *CBS Cracks Down on Sales of "Star Trek" Goods in Second Life*, <http://slnewserextra.blogspot.com.au/2012/11/cbs-cracks-down-on-sales-of-star-trek.html>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

191 Shuftan, B., (2010), *Linden Labs Cracks Down on "Battlestar Galactica" Sims After Universal Studios Complaints*, <http://slnewser.blogspot.com.au/2010/11/linden-labs-cracks-down-on-battlestar.html>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

192 Shuftan, B., (2011), *Universal Studios to Allow "Battlestar Galactica" Groups and Content in Second Life*, <http://slnewser.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/universal-studios-to-allow-battlestar.html>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

193 Reuveni, E. (2007), "Authorship in the Age of the Conducer", *Copyright Society of the*

free culture, are the proof that these presumptions can no longer be taken for granted. The Free Culture Movement, named after Lessig's eponymous book<sup>194</sup> and also drawing heavily on the work of Richard Stallman in promoting Free Software<sup>195</sup> (which explains its strong presence in online culture) seeks to promote awareness and use of Free Content, which is defined by Stallman (here he is speaking specifically about Free Software) as content that allows one;

- The freedom to run the program, for any purpose (freedom 0).
- The freedom to study how the program works, and change it so it does your computing as you wish (freedom 1).
- The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor (freedom 2).
- The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others (freedom 3).<sup>196</sup>

Lessig argues that the "copyright wars"<sup>197 198</sup> are centered on the problem that the ease of subverting copyright law renders it obsolete. Moreover he argues that the necessities of digital life require the law to be changed as it is impossible for computers to function without making copies<sup>199 200</sup>.

A rebuttal of Lessig's position might be that surely if we make everything that is easy to accomplish, and impossible to prevent, legal, then we must make murder legal. For it is trivially easy to employ a firearm in the termination of

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USA, Vol. 54, Issue 218, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1113491>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

194 Lessig, L., (2004), *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, [http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free\\_culture.lawrence\\_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf](http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free_culture.lawrence_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf), Accessed 18/12/2013.

195 Stallman, R. M., (2008), *Philosophy of the GNU Project*, <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/philosophy.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

196 Stallman, R. M., (2008), *What is Free Software*, <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

197 Lessig, L., (2008), *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, p. XV, <https://archive.org/details/LawrenceLessigRemix>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

198 Lessig, L., (2004), "The Creative Commons", *Montana Law Review*, Vol. 65, Issue 1, p. 4.

199 Lessig, L., (2008), *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, p. 38, <https://archive.org/details/LawrenceLessigRemix>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

200 Committee on Intellectual Property Rights in the Emerging Information Infrastructure, Computer Science and Telecommunications Board, National Research Council, (2001), *The Digital Dilemma: Intellectual Property in the Information Age*, National Academies Press, Washington, p. 140.



another's life. However there is a moral argument that murder deprives someone of their life, whereas, as I shall argue in more detail later, no one is deprived of anything in the case of digital copying.

We encounter the new and we add it, Borg like, to ourselves and become a new thing. Just as in nature everything is a hybrid likewise it is with religion and culture. Cusack<sup>201</sup> has noted that it has been the declining reach of Christianity that has allowed so many new religions to flourish in the last two hundred years. She points out that scholars of religious studies have come to agree that this flourishing is a symptom of a healthy and free society, and that it only slows where repressive state power is employed to curtail it<sup>202</sup>. In the case of copyright it is the decline of centralised content production and distribution that is allowing new cultural forms to appear.

This is the reason why the copyright wars are so important. The process that the corporations seek to constrain is the healthy and free creation of culture itself. They want to control not only what, but how, and when, we experience, and this ultimately means they want to control what we become. The copyright control mechanism in Second Life, known as the permissions system, was inserted in an attempt to effect the requirements of copyright law. Initially it didn't exist. When it was instituted, being in the world was restricted by copyright. This reshaping of culture by means of copyright is just one of the shared problems, a problem for both companies seeking to control content and users wishing to create their own, that need to be solved in the internet age. It is the same problem as new religions are experiencing as we move from the monopoly of the Abrahamic religions to a more open and diverse user created domain of religion.

My experiences in Second Life have caused me to come to believe that another shared problem driving the creation of new cultures<sup>203</sup> in virtual worlds is indubitably a dissatisfaction with the shared culture of meatspace. People are not getting what they want from their meatspace community, if they have one. This is usually expressed as a desire to be more free. Many of the people in the communities I participated in had no meatspace community to which they felt they belonged. Most because of cultural isolation, that is they are living in a meatspace community which is strongly at variance with what they feel to be their own cultural norms. For example, Pagans living in the bible belt of the US are people who seriously fear violence if they reveal their religious affiliation to those around them in meatspace. For various reasons these cultural isolates find they cannot move to a different meatspace community and so a virtual community becomes their only option for greater freedom and self expression.

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201 Cusack, C., (2010), *Invented Religions*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 141-149.

202 Cusack, C., (2010), *Invented Religions*, Ashgate, Farnham, p. 149.

203 Becker, H. S., (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Free Press, New York, p. 81.

Paradoxically online communities can be both more enduring and more ephemeral than those in meatspace. In a world where the populace is more mobile than ever one might relocate to a new geographical location several times in one's life, or one might have to travel extensively for one's work. In such circumstances the online community one is a member of may become the most enduring community one participates in. However as communities are no longer formed exclusively on the basis of geographic location but are often online communities, they may rise and fall as those online sites live and die.

But even those members of the community who were embedded in meatspace communities that were not openly hostile to them expressed a dislocation from the norms of their meatspace culture which was sufficiently important to them that they chose rather to live in a virtual world, and often saw it as their primary reality. Ordinary people are aware that corporations are not held to the same standards as they are, especially in relation to copyright. The integrity of those acting to restrict access to content is compromised in that they use not only legal means in their attempts to do so, but also use exactly the same tactics as criminals and black hat hackers<sup>204</sup> Sony's rootkit fiasco being among the most memorable. If there is no equity under the law, why then would one feel obliged to abide by it?

Many members of the community expressed that they felt completely disempowered and unable to effect change in their meatspace communities. Most live in Western liberal democracies. It was likewise common for community members to echo Snog's famous lines "There is no democracy. There is no America. There is only IBM and ITT, Union Carbide and Exxon"<sup>205</sup> as an expression of a shared perception that democracy is a lie, that corporations run the meatspace world, that voting changes nothing, that power elites are so entrenched that nothing short of armed revolution will effect change of a magnitude sufficient to bring about a society in which they want to live. Rather than expending what they feel is a futile effort to modify meatspace, or in a moral rejection of taking up arms to achieve change, members of the community were choosing to enter a virtual world in order to explore a frontier that they felt they could shape. They spoke of a desire to reject what they saw as the disempowering, fear laden, corrupt media gestalt of the meatspace world, and instead work to create a space they chose to believe is a separate world, with its own reality, where they could build the lives they really wanted. Or, perhaps more correctly, the lives they thought they really wanted. To find the freedom they so desperately sought. The freedom they have been conditioned by the dogma of democracy to believe is their birthright - and I was one of them.

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204 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, pp. 24-27, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

205 Snog, (1992), *Corporate Slave*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXXzaaL8Khw>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

The single overriding expression of being in virtual worlds is the desirability of being able to be anything. To do anything. To use existing forms to create new meaning by remixing. To create new characters. To not be stuck in the rut that might be one's meatspace life. To create a new self in a way not possible in meatspace. To create and explore many selves, in many different worlds. To enter new spaces of being and knowing in ways not possible, or not feasibly possible, in meatspace. To push boundaries. To go to new places. To be free. To create and bring to life a character in a role play scenario is not inauthentic, it is a creative endeavor. It is as inauthentic as Shakespeare. One of Second Life's fatal flaws, its permission system, seeks to curtail this endless remix. It actively seeks to make it much harder to do so. In this respect it is at odds with the desire for the freedom to create the endless remix that is culture.

Copyright has moved from being a limited monopoly granted to encourage innovation to a stifling constraint on innovation<sup>206</sup>. This explains the growth of peer to peer and Free Culture. The gatekeepers have become too greedy and the peasants are revolting. In virtual worlds the peasants are making new spaces in which to create and innovate. Spaces where they do not wish to allow the corporations to control the creation of culture. They do this by ignoring, in overwhelming numbers, the constraints of copyright law. It is just not possible for all copyright violators to be prosecuted, and they know it<sup>207</sup>. Thus the strength of the rule of law is lessened by the excesses of the greedy.

In September 2007, Linden Lab started the Architecture Working Group, with membership open to any interested parties, in order to "open up the Second Life Grid from something operated solely by Linden Lab to where others can run parts of the grid"<sup>208</sup>. Indeed, as Ondrejka says, "creating the Metaverse is such a tremendous undertaking that it will need to happen in a distributed fashion"<sup>209</sup>. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2008, employees of both Linden Lab and IBM successfully teleported from the test Linden Lab grid to an OpenSimulator grid run by IBM<sup>210</sup>. This initiative resulted in the release of an open source version of the Second Life client software<sup>211</sup>. Soon after this Darren Guard initiated the OpenSimulator project to develop open source server software, which by its first birthday in 2008 had 250 users and 25 sims<sup>212</sup>. Over the past

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206 Lessig, L., (2004), *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, pp. 145-146, [http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free\\_culture.lawrence\\_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf](http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free_culture.lawrence_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf), Accessed 18/12/2013.

207 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, p. 2, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

208 Second Life Wiki, *Architecture Working Group*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Architecture\\_Working\\_Group](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Architecture_Working_Group), Accessed 01/02/2011.

209 Ondrejka, C., (2004), "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse", *New York Law School Law Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 99.

210 Second Life Wiki: *Open Grid Public Beta*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Open\\_Grid\\_Public\\_Beta](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Open_Grid_Public_Beta), Accessed 01/02/2011.

211 OpenSimulator, *History*, <http://opensimulator.org/wiki/History>, Accessed 01/02/2011.

212 OpenSimulator, *History*, <http://opensimulator.org/wiki/History>, Accessed 01/02/2011.

few years many other grids using the OpenSimulator server software have appeared and have probably already overtaken Second Life in number of sims<sup>213</sup>. This has had a tremendous impact on Second Life and its residents.

While these grids are still some way from being replacements for Second Life, they are developing at a considerable rate. There are still many problems to be solved, notably that of transfer of objects between grids. This can be done now on a limited basis, but once it is a completely solved problem it will irrevocably alter the nature of content management in virtual worlds. Residents already want to be able to move items they have purchased with them to whatever grid they visit. Content creators think they need to control their content. This tension needs to be resolved. Perhaps education of content creators regarding alternative business models is the best solution. The choice is between this and a Canute like attempt to stop the copying of digital items. In the fun economy those who are not fun will die.

Yet there is a disconnect between the language of the desire for this freedom and the actualisation of it. As yet, most it seems are not comfortable to accept the full mantle of control for their own cultural destinies. There are, for example, still more users of the gated, corporatised, community that is Second Life than there are for the fully open and libre OpenSimulator<sup>214 215</sup>.

It seems though that the tide is turning, indeed the pace of this change is accelerating. The number of sims in Second Life has been declining slowly but steadily since late 2010 while the number of OpenSimulator sims have been climbing at a much faster rate than Second Life's decline<sup>216</sup>. There are now 249 discrete OpenSimulator grids with over 25,000 sims<sup>217</sup>. In OpenSimulator land holders can make their own choices about how to implement and apply object permission settings and can also choose to allow or restrict the movement of goods from their sim.

The cost of the change is what keeps users in Second Life. Despite their early rhetoric of Second Life being "your world" Linden Lab has made a concerted effort to prevent users from taking the things they built or bought in the world of Second Life to other worlds. One buys virtual goods in Second Life with real

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213 OpenSimulator, *Grid List*, <http://opensimulator.org/wiki/OpenSim:Grids>, Accessed 01/02/2011.

214 Korolov, M., (2014), *Grid Activity Down Slightly in January*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2014/01/grid-activity-down-slightly-in-january/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

215 Nino, T., (NDP), *Second Life Statistical Charts*, <http://dwellonit.taterunino.net/sl-statistical-charts/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

216 Korolov, M., (2014), *Grid Activity Down Slightly in January*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2014/01/grid-activity-down-slightly-in-january/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

217 Korolov, M., (2014), *Active OpenSim Grids*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/statistics/active-grids/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

money, but one is prevented, in fact prohibited, from taking those goods into other spaces. This is the single most important factor that keeps people in Second Life when other factors cause them to want to leave.

Will this process of democratisation and remix continue or will those seeking to restrict information win out? I suggest democratisation and remixing will prevail. I am optimistic that, because this process is such a basic part of being human, we will not fully arrive in the Orwellian nightmare of 1984. We may hover at the edges of it, but I do not believe that it is possible to continue to be human if our ability to remix is removed. Lessig likewise believes that it is impossible to stop it, that decades of evidence from the copyright wars demonstrate this<sup>218</sup>. Kurzweil, pondering on a cosmic scale, notes that "universes that do not support the creation of increasing complexity die out"<sup>219</sup>.

Kurzweil<sup>220</sup> goes further and asserts that this process of information recombination leading to new outcomes will expand exponentially. Kurzweil bases his predictions on the idea that "It is the evolution of patterns that constitutes the story of our world"<sup>221</sup>. Although Kurzweil's focus is on computing his ideas are just as applicable to ritual. Rituals are a series of patterns repeated and adapted and repeated. Moreover our use of ritual, like everything else, is now intertwined with information technology, the performance of ritual in virtual worlds being an exemplary example. Thus it enters the realm of Kurzweil's remit. Kurzweil sees this exponential growth as speeding us on our way to the singularity, "A future period when the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed"<sup>222</sup>.

In this singularity approaching time, change occurs much more quickly. Though the corporate push for monopolies on ideas has possibly still not yet reached its greatest extent, it could still become much more oppressive and become exactly like the scenario that Orwell laid out in 1984, this attempt to restrict access to information will ultimately fail because of the avalanche of free, both libre and gratis, information that is becoming available to us. Kurzweil proposed in his 1999 book *The Age of Spiritual Machines* what he called The Law of Accelerating Returns.

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218 Lessig, L., (2008), *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, p. 271, <https://archive.org/details/LawrenceLessigRemix>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

219 Kurzweil, R., (2005), *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Penguin Books, New York, p. 15.

220 Kurzweil, R., (2005), *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Penguin Books, New York.

221 Kurzweil, R., (2005), *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Penguin Books, New York, p. 15.

222 Kurzweil, R., (2005), *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Penguin Books, New York, p. 7.

An analysis of the history of technology shows that technological change is exponential, contrary to the common-sense “intuitive linear” view. So we won’t experience 100 years of progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century — it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today’s rate). The “returns,” such as chip speed and cost-effectiveness, also increase exponentially. There’s even exponential growth in the rate of exponential growth. Within a few decades, machine intelligence will surpass human intelligence, leading to The Singularity — technological change so rapid and profound it represents a rupture in the fabric of human history. The implications include the merger of biological and nonbiological intelligence, immortal software-based humans, and ultra-high levels of intelligence that expand outward in the universe at the speed of light.<sup>223</sup>

The rituals performed in the communities I participated in are evidence of this exponential growth. Even only fifty years ago access to the details of the ancient ritual used would have been restricted to academics or those with access to particularly good libraries. Certainly one would not have been able to construct a ritual based on them, while sitting at home in front of a computer in less than an hour, without access to the internet, itself a product of this exponential growth. My own research is a further example of this exponential growth. I was able to, by utilising the fastest growing expression of this exponential growth, the microchip, participate in this online community, a thing impossible without the combination of microchip plus internet. Should I have the ability to travel back in time to meet myself at age 16 I would be unable to explain to my younger self the topic of this research. There would be insufficient referents. There were no personal computers and no computer games in my childhood. There was no internet and thus the concept of a real time, interactive, immersive community of persons from all around the world was unimaginable. All these things are a part of our headlong rush towards the singularity.

One product of the approaching singularity will be our own integration with computers. We won’t be meatspace humans doing rituals in virtual worlds, rather, Kurzweil argues<sup>224</sup> we will integrate technology into our bodies, or abandon our bodies completely and become software. In this way we will become what Kurzweil calls spiritual machines<sup>225</sup>. The process of immersing ourselves in online communities is a step on the road to Kurzweil’s singularity. He argues<sup>226</sup> that when the singularity occurs we will become a blending of computer and human, even going so far as to say that we may, eschewing the

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223 Kurzweil, R., (2001), *The Law of Accelerating Returns*, <http://www.kurzweilai.net/the-law-of-accelerating-returns>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

224 Kurzweil, R., (1999), *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, Penguin Books, New York.

225 Kurzweil, R., (1999), *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, Penguin Books, New York.

226 Kurzweil, R., (1999), *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, Penguin Books, New York.



meat, upload our consciousness into machine bodies in a quest for immortality. Certainly my experience of being in cyberspace, the process of becoming one with an avatar, seems like a step on this path. In those moments when I became the avatar, when I slipped into the moment of flow, my consciousness was not at all on my meatspace body. My centre of attention slipped into the avatar. My consciousness entered the machine.

We have evolved from the monopolisation of single ideas by an elite, to a democratization of knowledge and education because this fits our purpose, which is survival, better. The greater the number of us as a species who have access to ideas and education the greater the likelihood of our continued survival. If more humans can make fire, more humans will stay alive. Information access is a survival prerequisite. To characterize this in theological terms, the word is god. From this perspective, corporations seeking to monopolise access to ideas, through such means as copyright restrictions and patents, are trying to own a piece of god. In doing this they are acting to restrict both our evolution as a species and our divine purpose, that being to experience gnosis.

## Welcome

Welcome then to my ancient Egyptian themed world within a world within a world. A new world, built inside and from the meatspace world. A world whose inhabitants choose to see as separate from the meatspace world. A world where we can create ourselves anew, create our society anew, because we believe we have more agency there than in the meatspace world, where change is hard and our agency low. A world where we can, for the first time in human history, be as persons without the fear of physical reprisal. Yet we are so accustomed to being in the meat that this freedom does not come easily to us. Even when in a space where we should be liberated from it we are still, as you shall see, driven to action by those same fears.

In this world you will meet the other persons that inhabit the world. Your meeting will be at one remove, filtered by my reality tunnel, and you will come to know these persons in the same way I did, through the text on the screen and based on how their avatars look. You will be unsure of their meatspace identities, motivations and goals, unsure of their race, age, gender or native culture. Just as they are, you will be aware of your lack of awareness, aware that the avatar is not the person, and, just as they do, you will come to see the avatar as the person.

I hope that you will form some understanding of why I came to choose to be an avatar person, a serial self, and that you will come to see Second Life as more than 'just a game', that derisive phrase residents of Second Life hear all too often, but rather as an attempt to live in a culture of our own creation. One where one is free to create and share, to remix, to experiment with

culture creation, to be free from fear of physical pain, and then to bring the knowledge gained in that experiment back into the meatspace world. Also I hope that, though my recounting of my experiences of ritual in the world, I can shed some light on the nature of effective ritual practice in all worlds. Lastly I hope my ponderings on the ontology and theology, of both the virtual world and this meatspace one, will reveal to you what I found in my search for gnosis in cyberspace.



## 2. The Mechanics Of The World Of Second Life

Second Life is not a game. It is an environment that facilitates creation and sharing. A set of powerful inbuilt building tools allow residents great latitude in creating objects and their environment. In this chapter I present a comprehensive analysis of how the Second Life content creation tools work. I will take a detailed look at the features and capabilities of the building tools available inworld as well as tools to create avatars. Using examples of things I created to augment my experience I will show what is possible, and discuss the various problems one encounters when building. I will examine how the choices Linden Lab have made about how the content creation process works, and how content is distributed, have impacted outcomes for residents. Finally issues of ownership of digital property and business models are discussed.

When a resident first enters the world there is necessarily a lot of focus on how things work. Moving through the process of learning how the software client works and how to do things in the world is a vital part of becoming a resident. When we are newborns in meatspace, we must first come to terms with the nature of being a physical being and learn how our own bodies work before we can act in that world. Likewise, when we enter Second Life we must learn how to be an avatar and how the world of the avatar works.

Second Life employs the client-server model. The simulations that make up the world are running on servers maintained by Linden Lab which residents use an application installed on their computer, known as client software, to connect to via the internet. Linden Lab's client is known as the Second Life Viewer<sup>227</sup>. There are also a number of third party viewers<sup>228</sup> that can be used to connect to the Second Life servers.

During the time of my research I used first the Emerald Viewer, and, after Emerald's removal from the approved viewers list due to the discovery of backdoors that compromised the client<sup>229</sup> I changed to the Phoenix Viewer (see figure 6)<sup>230</sup>.

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227 Linden Lab, *Second Life Viewer*, <https://secondlife.com/support/downloads/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

228 Second Life Wiki, *Third Party Viewer Directory*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Third\\_Party\\_Viewer\\_Directory](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Third_Party_Viewer_Directory). Accessed 02/04/2014.

229 Lefebvre, E., (2010), *Second Life's Emerald client facing obsolescence*, <http://massively.joystiq.com/2010/08/24/second-lifes-emerald-client-facing-obsolescence/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

230 Phoenix Firestorm Project, *Phoenix Viewer Downloads For Second Life*, [http://wiki.phoenixviewer.com/phoenix:phoenix\\_downloads](http://wiki.phoenixviewer.com/phoenix:phoenix_downloads). Accessed 02/04/2014.



figure 6. Phoenix viewer version 1.61.1691

In virtual worlds there exists what Castronova<sup>231</sup> describes as the fun economy. Because games and virtual worlds seek to attract and retain players and residents they have fun as their primary imperative. Why would one play a game, or engage with a virtual world, in which the activities one participates in are not fun?

Harambam et al. predict that “the modern dichotomy of a free realm of play and an unfree realm of work may become increasingly problematic”<sup>232</sup>. This is exactly what Castronova<sup>233</sup> posits will be the future of work, and indeed politics, in that those who have grown up participating in virtual worlds and games, being accustomed to developers responding to their fun requirement will expect the same from their meatspace employers and leaders. Harambam et al. further cite Dibble;

Dibble even goes so far as to argue that ‘play’ constitutes the new rejuvenating force in stifled and fossilized capitalism. We seem to be entering, he argues playfully, partly serious, a new era of ‘ludocapitalism’ that transcends modern distinctions such as work versus leisure and profit versus fun.<sup>234</sup>

231 Castronova, E., (2007), *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 137-187.

232 Harambam, J., Aupers, S., Goutman, D., (2009), "The Quest for the Ultimate Game: World of Warcraft, Second Life and the Commercialization of Virtual Game Worlds", *Sociologie*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 19.

233 Castronova, E., (2007), *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

234 Harambam, J., Aupers, S., Goutman, D., (2009), "The Quest for the Ultimate Game: World of Warcraft, Second Life and the Commercialization of Virtual Game Worlds", *Sociologie*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 20.

While some game and world developers do respond to user input, Linden Lab is famous<sup>235</sup> for largely ignoring the input of their residents, for example one asks, "Any oldbies old enough around here to tell us how it felt in that legendary time when the Lindens did listen and, occasionally, heed?"<sup>236</sup>. This has obvious parallels with contemporary political processes, for example as recently seen in Ukraine when the president, Viktor Yanukovych reneged on his commitment to pursue trade ties with the European Union and instead signed a trade pact with Russia<sup>237</sup> resulting in the *Euromaidan* (Eurosquare) protests and his removal from office<sup>238</sup>. Unlike in the meatspace world, in cyberspace one can usually just go somewhere else if one doesn't like the rules of a particular game or world, which is exactly Castronova's point. So how did residents of Second Life respond to the way Linden Lab failed to listen to their requests and suggestions? Initially there was no comparable place residents could go to as there were no other worlds to compare with Second Life. But once the open grids based on the Second Life software came along residents suddenly had somewhere else to go, and go they do, in ever increasing numbers, while Second Life's world continues to shrink at an ever increasing rate<sup>239</sup>.

Residents have enthusiastically embraced the freedom to create which Second Life gives them and the result is a world where most everything is created by them. The motivation for users to create their own entertainment is freedom and fun. The age of passive entertainment and the centralized creation of content is dying and a new age of creation and sharing is upon us. The technologies of the personal computer and the internet have facilitated this new age. The vast array of creative tools now available, combined with the ease and low cost of distribution facilitated by the internet, have opened the door to a user created world.

In order for a virtual world to be fun it needs content. While socialising is a very important part of Second Life's attraction to users the aesthetic aspects of the world are crucial to its success. People come together in communities in Second Life and they represent the defining characteristics of those communities in the environment they create. Fans of Gor build environments that resemble the world of Gor. Steampunks build fantastic retro-futuristic environments. Universities build copies of their meatspace campuses.

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235 Korolov, M., (2013), *Outrage grows over new Second Life terms*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2013/09/outrage-grows-over-new-second-life-terms/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

236 Nino, T., (2011), *Why should Linden Lab listen to your feedback anyway?*, <http://dwellonit.taterunino.net/2011/03/01/why-should-linden-lab-listen-to-your-feedback-anyway/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

237 Al Jazeera, (2013), *Ukraine drops EU plans and looks to Russia*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/11/ukraine-drops-eu-plans-looks-russia-20131121145417227621.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

238 Wikipedia, *Euromaidan*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euromaidan>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

239 Korolov, M., (2014), *Grid Activity Down Slightly in January*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2014/01/grid-activity-down-slightly-in-january/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

Even the very earliest role playing adventure games had a form of user created content. Magazines would print source code that users could type into their computers to add new features to their games<sup>240</sup>. The Sims was however the first game/world to depend on user-created content, with content creation tools being released before the game<sup>241</sup>. Many virtual worlds and games afford some level of user input into content, but it is generally only user customised content, i.e. users can assemble content provided by the game developers into new configurations. It is worth noting that even when customisation is the only option available to them people enthusiastically try to create, and do so even in games that don't explicitly allow, and indeed ban such behaviour, for example, Ultima Online, where users have combined existing items in the world to create things that looked like other things, but are non-functional<sup>242</sup>.

So what is user created content? Fiesler, relying on the OECD's definition, says it is "created outside of one's professional routine; it is something that people do in their free time, usually without monetary compensation"<sup>243</sup>, but this definition is lacking, for example, many residents have made content creation in Second Life their profession, but they are not being paid by Linden Lab to do so. I define user created content as an open and distributed rather than a closed and centralized content creation paradigm. It is anything created by the users of, rather than the creators of, a system, where those two entities are separate.

Fiesler goes on to say user created content "...is the product of a new movement towards a participative web culture, cultivated by new technology that is accessible and affordable by the general public"<sup>244</sup>. Here I think she is getting to the core of it. I see creation and community as being at the core of the Second Life experience. As Lawrence Lessig says,

Technology could enable a whole generation to create - remixed films, new forms of music, digital art, a new kind of story telling, writing, a new technology for poetry, criticism, political activism - and then, through the infrastructure of the internet, share that creativity with others.<sup>245</sup>

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240 Scott, J., (2010), *Get Lamp*, <http://www.getlamp.com/>. Accessed 11/02/2014.

241 Ondrejka, C., (2004), "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse", *New York Law School Law Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 84.

242 UO Stratics Staff, *How To Make The Pianos*, [http://uo.stratics.com/homes/betterhomes/essay\\_piano.shtml](http://uo.stratics.com/homes/betterhomes/essay_piano.shtml). Accessed 01/02/2011

243 Fiesler, C., (2008), "Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Fandom: How Existing Social Norms Can Help Shape the Next Generation of User-Generated Content", *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, Vol. 10, p. 733.

244 Fiesler, C., (2008), "Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Fandom: How Existing Social Norms Can Help Shape the Next Generation of User-Generated Content", *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, Vol. 10, p. 741.

245 Lessig, L., (2001), *The Future of Ideas*, Random House, New York.

This is exactly what I see in Second Life. Residents are choosing to engage with Second Life because it provides them something more than passive observation (like television), or directed interactions (like video games). It allows them to be the masters of their own creative destinies, destinies facilitated by the personal computer and the internet. It allows them the freedom to have fun, and possibly to profit, in a space not bounded by, or that they consider to be not bounded by, the constraints of meatspace. This prioritisation of freedom and fun may one day be actualised in the political world of meatspace, but until that day comes we will continue to experience a conflict between the realities of meatspace and cyberspace.

Some have argued that there is no conflict as there is no difference between meatspace and cyberspace. Malpas<sup>246</sup> asserts that "The virtual does not introduce any special legal or ethical problems that are peculiar to the virtual alone". However he has overlooked the infinite replication at no cost of digital goods. Once a digital item has been made it can be replicated at no cost infinitely. But Malpas is not alone in missing the importance of this aspect of virtual life. Copyright holders and many content creators likewise fail to account for this phenomenon in their dealings with virtual worlds. The idea of content theft in virtual worlds seems hard to justify when the concept of theft itself seems not to apply. If I make a car in meatspace and you come and take it from me I no longer have a car. You have stolen it from me. If I make a car in a virtual world I can give an identical copy to you and still have an infinite number of cars myself. It seems clear that I as the maker of the car can rightly claim some reward for having made the car. But do I deserve this reward an infinite number of times? I suggest not. The key factor here is that I do not suffer a loss if you also have a copy of the car. I still have an infinitely replicable car. While copyright holders have argued that the loss of a potential sale is an actual loss<sup>247</sup> this argument is spurious as there is no way to ascertain if this potential sale would ever have been realised. The fact that one might download a copy of a movie is not proof that one would ever have bought it. One might not have the means to purchase it or one might find it of such poor quality that no desire to purchase it exists.

The fact that no actual, physical loss occurs gives the lie to any idea of theft. Michael<sup>248</sup> describes this as being a contrast between a physical constraint and a social constraint. If I am driving my car in meatspace you cannot simultaneously be driving it. This is a physical constraint. In contrast to this, the concept of copyright, which constrains you from taking a copy of my car in a virtual world, is a social constraint.

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246 Malpas, J., (2009), "On the Non Autonomy of the Virtual", *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 138.

247 Geist, M., (2005), "Piercing the peer-to-peer myths: An examination of the Canadian Experience", *First Monday*, Vol. 10, No. 4.

248 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>. Accessed 31/01/2014.



In an effort to address the lack of physical constraints in virtual worlds, and to artificially replicate the scarcity of objects in the meatspace world, Linden Lab created a software analogue of Lessig's aforementioned permission culture<sup>249</sup>. The Second Life permissions system is designed to allow the creator of an object to decide what degree of control they want other residents to have over their creations. All objects have three permissions; modify, copy and resell/give away (the last is generally referred to as transfer). The permissions system is however easily circumventable, with programs in existence that allow users to copy even items with restricted permissions, and some third party viewers supporting object export<sup>250</sup>. The system is widely resented and ridiculed by residents, including many content creators, many of them being those who wish to give their content away for free. Support for the permissions system is found among many who seek to make a living from their virtual creations.

## How It Works

Every day thousands of people log on to Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORGs), or 'virtual worlds', where they not only consume creative products by playing the game, but also produce such products by independently creating content that then becomes a part of the MMORG. Other gaming companies encourage their end-users to modify, or 'mod', the core elements of their games, resulting in consumers using the developer's original game as a baseline to create what are essentially entirely new gaming experiences.<sup>251</sup>

In Second Life residents are able to create or manipulate nearly all types of content that make up the world around them, and create they do. The former CTO of Linden Lab, Cory Ondrejka, claimed that "as of June 2007, residents were adding over 300 gigabytes of data to the world every day, one million distinct items had been bought or sold in the preceding month, and tens of millions of scripts were running at all times within the Second Life grid."<sup>252</sup> There are very few things one can't change, for example the Moon and stars cannot be customised. Apart from these few exceptions, everything; the

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249 Lessig, L., (2004), *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, p. 4, [http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free\\_culture.lawrence\\_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf](http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free_culture.lawrence_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf), Accessed 18/12/2013.

250 Second Life Forum, (2011), *The truth about copybot*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/General-Discussions/The-truth-about-copybot/td-p/481152>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

251 Reuveni, E. (2007), "Authorship in the Age of the Conductor", *Copyright Society of the USA*, Vol. 54, Issue 218, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1113491>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

252 Ondrejka, C., (2007), "Collapsing Geography (Second Life, Innovation, and the Future of National Power)", *Innovations*, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 35.

landscape, oceans, atmosphere, length of day, buildings, vehicles, clothing, flora, fauna and one's own avatar can be made in any image one can imagine. This freedom is Second Life's most attractive feature<sup>253</sup>.

Second Life facilitates content creation by including inworld building tools within the viewer client software. This provides instant gratification. One can immediately see the things one is creating in the context in which they will be ordinarily used, or displayed, and can interact with one's creations immediately. Moreover, other residents can see what one is building, and collaborative building is possible. While the possibilities for inworld content creation are expansive, external applications are still necessary for creating some types of content, for example, textures and sounds.

Objects can contain other objects of various types, for example, if an object plays a sound, the sound file needs to be placed inside the object. Every item within an object has its permissions set independently of the parent object. Unfortunately, even when one does take care to set the permissions of each object and its child objects, the permissions system often fails for no discernible reason, resulting in objects with permissions set contrary to the creator's desires. This has serious implications for collaborative building.

If two or more residents wish to collaborate in the creation of objects each resident must grant their collaborators permission to edit their objects, or give full permission copies of their objects to their collaborators (remembering to set the permissions of all child objects correctly), who will then work with those objects independently, but a single resident must do final assembly. This leads to a high level of frustration when doing cooperative building, as Wadley and Ducheneaut found when participants in their study complained that "the permissions system was not conducive to collaboration"<sup>254</sup>. My experience is that very often, despite having correctly set these permissions, residents will still be unable to edit others' objects because the permissions system is buggy and unreliable.

Another obstacle to collaborative building when using the Linden Lab Second Life viewer, is the difficulty residents have in knowing what other residents are looking at, which lessens their ability to collaborate<sup>255</sup>. The problem is predominantly one of reference points combined with dislocation from one's

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253 Harambam, J., Aupers, S., Goutman, D., (2009), "The Quest for the Ultimate Game: World of Warcraft, Second Life and the Commercialization of Virtual Game Worlds", *Sociologie*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 7.

254 Wadley, G., Ducheneaut, N., (2009), "The 'out-of-avatar experience': object-focused collaboration in Second Life", *ECSCW'09: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 7-11 September 2009. Vienna, Austria, p. 335, <http://people.eng.unimelb.edu.au/gwadley/pubs/ECSCW09-WadleyDucheneaut.pdf>. Accessed 08/02/2014.

255 Hindmarsh, J., Fraser, M., Heath, C., Benford, S., Greenhalgh, C., (1998), "Fragmented Interaction: Establishing Mutual Orientation in Virtual Environments", *Proceedings of the 1998 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, New York, NY, pp. 217-226.

avatar when building. Second Life has the capability to decouple one's view from one's avatar's, which is very useful when building in 3D as it allows one to examine all sides of an object. However the Second Life viewer does not presently offer an option to allow one to determine where another is looking, though this feature was introduced in the third party Emerald viewer<sup>256</sup> and remains in its successor, the Phoenix Viewer. Because of the ability to decouple one's view from the avatar's, one's building partner is almost certainly not looking at the world from the same point of view, and because, in the absence of data regarding the other's point of view, the tendency is to imagine that each person is viewing the world from the avatar's location, giving instructions to each other can be a confusing business. Wadley and Ducheneaut<sup>257</sup> found that the more experienced a Second Life user is, the more likely they are to detach their view. Combined with the increased awareness of disparity of views that comes with experience in Second Life, this problem should therefore be less prevalent in experienced users.

## Prims

Content in Second Life is created using the inworld building tools (see figure 7) which allow residents to construct objects by using a set of basic shapes, known as prims (primitives). The prims available are; cube, prism, pyramid, tetrahedron, cylinder, hemicylinder, cone, hemicone, sphere, hemisphere, torus, tube, ring, tree and grass. As well as allowing their position, size and rotation to be adjusted, these basic shapes can be modified by resizing, twisting, hollowing, shearing, slicing, tapering, revolving, dimpling, stretching, cutting, or adjusting the size of holes in prims such as rings. These transformations are colloquially referred to as torturing.

Prims can be linked together to form complex objects. Prims within a linked set can be no more than thirty two metres apart, and there can be no more than 256 prims in a linked set. There is no capability to create hierarchical linked sets, i.e. to link linked sets to each other. This is a serious limitation, especially in the construction of working machines. Only prims owned by the same avatar can be linked, which is another annoying impediment to collaborative building<sup>258</sup>.

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256 Modular Systems, *Emerald Viewer*, [http://modularsystems.sl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=8](http://modularsystems.sl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=8), No longer online.

257 Wadley, G., Ducheneaut, N., (2009), "The 'out-of-avatar experience': object-focused collaboration in Second Life", *ECSCW'09: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 7-11 September 2009. Vienna, Austria, p. 332, <http://people.eng.unimelb.edu.au/gwadley/pubs/ECSCW09-WadleyDucheneaut.pdf>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

258 Wadley, G., Ducheneaut, N., (2009), "The 'out-of-avatar experience': object-focused collaboration in Second Life", *ECSCW'09: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 7-11 September 2009. Vienna, Austria, p. 335, <http://people.eng.unimelb.edu.au/gwadley/pubs/ECSCW09-WadleyDucheneaut.pdf>, Accessed 08/02/2014.



For most of my time in Second Life the maximum prim size able to be created was 10m in any dimension, though even larger and smaller objects were possible with a bit of creativity. Nano prims, i.e. under 1cm<sup>3</sup> can be created by applying path cuts and otherwise torturing prims. Mega prims, i.e. over 10m<sup>3</sup>, while not then able to be created, were previously, and were also able to be created by exploiting bugs in the Second Life viewer which have occurred from time to time in the period since mega prims were disallowed. Copies of existing mega prims could be obtained from other residents or purchased. The basic shape of a mega prim can be changed, and it can be tortured, but any attempt to resize it will cause it to revert back to no more than 10m on a side. This is an arbitrary limit imposed by Linden Lab and does not apply to the OpenSimulator project<sup>259</sup> where prims of any size may be created. Since 2011 Linden Lab increased the maximum size of prims to 64m<sup>260</sup>. I found it curious that Linden Lab did not allow mega prims sooner as they reduce server load by lowering the number of prims required to construct large objects. One possible reason is that if a mega prim is larger than the draw distance preference (i.e. the radius in metres of a circle surrounding your avatar within which the world is rendered), it will not be rendered by the viewer, resulting in avatars colliding with objects that are invisible to them. However, my experience suggests that the typical user has a draw distance of 200 metres, so incidences of this problem should be rare, except for extremely large mega prims.

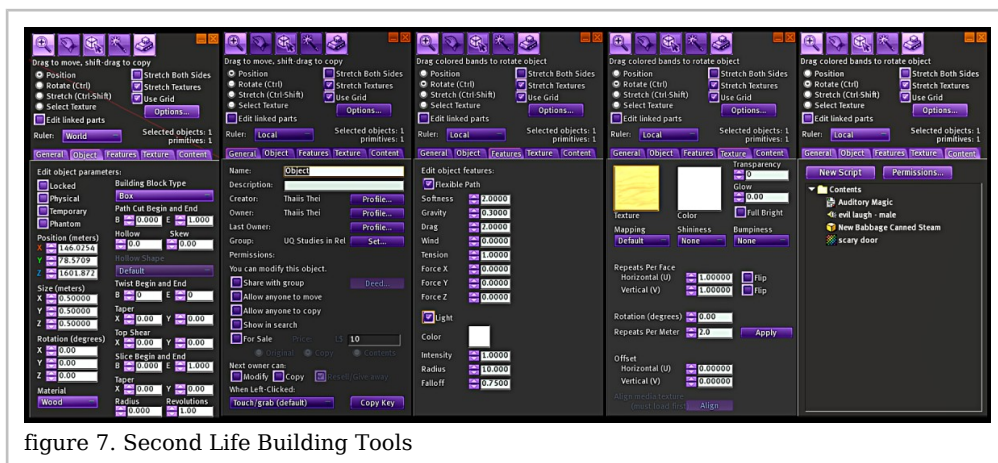


figure 7. Second Life Building Tools

Prims may have a number of attributes applied to them. Some prims can be made flexible, which allows them to be used in, for example, clothing creation. Prims can also be made phantom, which means they will then present no barrier, i.e. one can walk through a phantom prim. Prims can be made to emit light or to glow. All objects can also be made physical, which means that they will interact with the world's physics engine. If one created an ordinary sphere one metre above the ground (creating objects in the world is known as

259 OpenSimulator, *Main Page*, [http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Main_Page). Accessed 01/02/2011.

260 Second Life Wiki, *Mega Prim*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Mega\\_Prim](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Mega_Prim). Accessed 08/02/2014.

rezzing, from resolved), it would simply hang in midair in the spot in which it was rezzed. Once the physical property is applied, the sphere will fall to the ground under the influence of the world's gravity. One could then kick it around like a ball in meatspace.

This property produced the first occasion when I experienced a crossover of the two worlds of meatspace and virtual space. When I first discovered the physical property I spent many hours playing around with physical objects in the world. I made many shapes and kicked them around with my avatar. A few days later I had occasion to move a number of large cardboard boxes from inside my meatspace house to storage underneath the house. Rather than carry each one individually I kicked them down my sloped driveway towards the storage space under the house. As I did so I experienced a weird sensation of being in the wrong world. For a few moments I was back in the world kicking physical objects around.

Linked sets of objects with the physical property set can have a maximum of thirty two prims<sup>261</sup>. This means that as vehicles are physical objects they are limited to thirty two prims. Because highly detailed vehicles are prized a recent workaround to overcome this limitation has been the production of vehicles that are not actually vehicles as specified with LSL (Linden Scripting Language, see below) but which are worn by the avatar, as an avatar can wear more than thirty two prims.

The large volume of space available to the builder makes it possible to lose prims, and there is no inbuilt tool for finding them. There is not even provision to list all the objects on a given piece of land, unless one is the owner of that land. It is possible to build a scripted object that will scan for one's objects, but the maximum number of objects it is possible to find this way is sixteen and a scanners' maximum operating distance is limited to ninety six metres<sup>262</sup>.

Another type of object is the sculpted prim (known as sculpties)<sup>263</sup>. These are ordinary prims which have had a sculpt map applied to them. The sculpt map is an RGB image (presently of a maximum of 128x128 pixels in Second Life), where the colour values are interpreted as X, Y and Z coordinates respectively. Sculpt maps are created outside of Second Life, either using resident made tools<sup>264</sup> or 3D rendering software<sup>265</sup>. Sculpted prims allow the creation of complex 3D shapes that require only one prim when rezzed in the

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261 Second Life Wiki, *Physical*, <http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Physical>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

262 LSL Wiki, *llSensor*, <http://lslwiki.net/lslwiki/wakka.php?wakka=llSensor>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

263 Second Life Wiki: *Sculpted Prims: Technical Explanation*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Sculpted\\_Prim\\_Explanation](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Sculpted_Prim_Explanation), Accessed 08/02/2014.

264 Second Life Wiki, *Sculpted Prims: Resident-made Tools*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Sculpted\\_Prims:\\_Resident-made\\_Tools](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Sculpted_Prims:_Resident-made_Tools), Accessed 08/02/2014.

265 Second Life Wiki, *Sculpted Prims: 3d Software Guide*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Sculpted\\_Prims:\\_3d\\_Software\\_Guide](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Sculpted_Prims:_3d_Software_Guide), Accessed 08/02/2014.

world. There are some disadvantages to using sculpted prims, for example, they cannot be made flexible, and it is often necessary to set sculpted prims to phantom. This is because the physical intersection of an object is its bounding box, and, as sculpted prims can be a substantially different shape to the prim to which they are applied, collision difficulties occur.

## Textures

Once prims have been rezzed they can be coloured and textured. All prims have the default plywood texture when first rezzed. A limited set of textures are provided by Linden Lab but residents can upload their own textures to the world. Texture uploads incur a small fee (approximately 5 US cents). Textures and colours can be applied to each surface individually or to the entire prim or linked set at once. Additional characteristics such as shininess, bumpiness, glow and transparency can also be applied.

Textures have a maximum resolution of 1024x1024 pixels<sup>266</sup>. Textures larger than this will be scaled down to fit this resolution when they are uploaded. All Second Life texture dimensions are constrained by powers of two, e.g. 1024x1024, 512x512. Supported formats are PNG, TGA, BMP and JPG<sup>267</sup>.

## Inventory Loss

In Second Life users have an inventory in which they can keep the items they acquire. Inventory items regularly went missing<sup>268 269 270 271</sup>. One day an item would be there and the next it would be gone. Whole folders would disappear and never return. Many members of the community contacted Linden Lab about it repeatedly. Well those of us who had premium accounts did. Users with free accounts had no access to Linden Lab at all. But even those of us with premium accounts had no success. Linden Lab's support was notoriously bad. It did improve slightly once they hired Rod Humble as their new CEO in

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266 Second Life Wiki, *Limits*, <http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Limits>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

267 Second Life Knowledge Base, *Uploading assets*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/English-Knowledge-Base/Uploading-assets/ta-p/700165>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

268 Second Life Wiki, *Inventory Loss*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Inventory\\_loss](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Inventory_loss), Accessed 08/02/2014.

269 Linden, H., (2007), *Inventory Loss Reduction Initiative*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Features/Inventory-Loss-Reduction-Initiative/ba-p/595948>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

270 Second Life JIRA (SVC-114), *Meta-Issue: Inventory Loss: issues, fixes, development*, <https://jira.secondlife.com/browse/SVC-114>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

271 Nino, T., (2008), *Second Life grid closed due to asset problems*, <http://massively.joystiq.com/2008/01/06/second-life-grid-closed-due-to-asset-problems/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

2011, but that was after both the communities I was studying had died<sup>272</sup>. At the time my study communities were alive Linden Lab's provision of support was a standing joke. I submitted many support requests about missing inventory. I had paid real, actual money for most of the items in my inventory and presumed Linden Lab would take this problem seriously. After all the continuing success of the merchants was vital to Second Life's success. Prior to the launch of web based digital goods marketplaces for Second Life like OnRez<sup>273</sup>, SL Exchange, and Xstreet<sup>274</sup> merchants had to have shops in the world if they wanted to sell items. Moreover Linden Lab provided absolutely no content beyond the avatars and their default sets of attire, so they relied entirely on resident merchants to supply goods. But I was wrong. Linden Lab appeared not to care. I got no replies to my support requests. I lost a great deal of data because of this problem and was never able to recover it.

If one was ever lucky enough to get a response to one's support request Linden Labs might suggest that one make a report to the bug tracking system, a particularity troublesome deployment of Atlassian's<sup>275</sup> JIRA software. Such a suggestion sent a shudder through the hearts of any resident as this system was fantastically complex, inscrutable and intolerant of inexactness. The JIRA system originally included a voting system which allowed users to vote on which bugs should be fixed first. Linden Lab were either never paying any attention to this system, or they were ignoring the input of residents, as many of the bugs with the highest votes were never fixed at all. Linden Lab eventually admitted this and removed the voting feature altogether<sup>276</sup>. This caused a great deal of unhappiness and a barrage of complaints from residents<sup>277 278</sup>. Linden Lab subsequently made a number of changes to the bug reporting process and the configuration of the JIRA resulting in a system that was much easier to use to submit bugs, but which lacked much of the important the functionality of the original system<sup>279</sup>.

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272 Nino, T., (2010), *Rod Humble becomes new CEO of Linden Lab in 2011*, <http://dwellonit.taterunino.net/2010/12/23/rod-humble-becomes-new-ceo-of-linden-lab/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

273 Marshall, S., (NDP), *Shop.OnRez.com - Spend Your Linden Dollars Here*, <http://www.killerstartups.com/ecommerce/shop-onrez-com-spend-your-linden-dollars-here/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

274 Xstreet was acquired by Linden Lab and became the current Second Life Marketplace

275 Atlassian Software, *Software Development and Collaboration Tools*, <https://www.atlassian.com/>, Accessed 10/02/2014.

276 Linden, A., (2011), *Improving our Lines of Communication with the Community*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Featured-News/Improving-our-Lines-of-Communication-with-the-Community/ba-p/675118>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

277 Second Thoughts, *The Last Vestiges of Democracy are Deprecated from Second Life*, [http://secondthoughts.typepad.com/second\\_thoughts/2011/02/the-last-vestiges-of-democracy-are-deprecated-from-second-life.html](http://secondthoughts.typepad.com/second_thoughts/2011/02/the-last-vestiges-of-democracy-are-deprecated-from-second-life.html), Accessed 08/02/2014.

278 Second Life Forum, (2011), *The Lindens Are Removing Voting from the JIRA*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/General-Discussions/The-Lindens-Are-Removing-Voting-from-the-JIRA/td-p/506691>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

279 Linden, A., (2011), *Improving our Lines of Communication with the Community*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Featured-News/Improving-our-Lines-of-Communication-with-the-Community/ba-p/675118>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

Residents railed against Linden Lab<sup>280</sup>. For example, In the original implementation it had been possible to search all previously submitted bugs to see if one's problem had already been reported and then to add one's own input to that bug. This functionality was removed in the later system. In the new system once a bug was reported it couldn't be edited to add new information, even by its submitter. Moreover the new system only allowed one to report new bugs, but had no functionality to allow one to see any previous bugs at all, and thus know if the bug had already been reported, a situation which had some residents prophesying the end of Second Life<sup>281</sup>. This situation was later changed to allow residents to see others' bugs, but still not be able to add information to them<sup>282</sup>.

This was my second disappointing interaction with Linden Lab. My perfect bubble of being enchanted by Second Life had been popped... again. I had been slightly disappointed by a misrepresentation on Linden Lab's part regarding the benefits of a Premium account, which I discuss later. But I had gotten over that. I had settled into a community and gotten on with my Second Life. But now they had pricked the bubble again and resentment had started to simmer. We who had wanted a perfect frontier, a tabula rasa, totally free reign to be and do as we like, had now discovered that we wanted fast tech support on our frontier, and we weren't getting it. So we looked for other solutions.

We found Second Inventory. Linden Lab offered no facility to make an offline backup of one's online inventory. Its reason was that this would break the permissions system. If one had purchased an item from a merchant who had set the permissions to 'no copy' then how could one make a backup copy? Second Inventory, later renamed to Stored Inventory as a result of Linden Lab's bizarre crackdown on the use of any of their trademarks in products associated with Second Life, is a third party application which is still marketed by Medialeader S.r.l, an Italian firm, but not supported. In fact the product no longer works, and posts to their support forums remain unanswered. Most of the traffic on the forums now is from users warning others not to purchase the product due to its non functional nature. However in 2009 when I purchased the software it did work. This product allowed one to make a local backup of the items in one's inventory. Initially it allowed a full backup of the inventory to one's local computer. But soon Second Life merchants were complaining that Second Inventory was a breach of the permissions system and the product was modified so that one could only backup items for which one had full permissions. The most annoying facet of

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280 Souther, T., (2012), *LL shoots itself in the ass again: public JIRA is closed*, <http://secondden.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/ll-shoots-itself-in-ass-again-public.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

281 Gothly, D., (2012), *Today Marks The End of Second Life*, <http://www.dgp4sl.com/wp/2012/09/today-marks-the-end-of-second-life/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

282 Linden Lab, (2012), *JIRA Update: Changes to The Bug Reporting Process*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Tools-and-Technology/JIRA-Update-Changes-to-The-Bug-Reporting-Process/ba-p/1660981>, Accessed 02/04/2014.



this change was that the first time one effected a backup with this new, crippled version it deleted all items one had previously backed up that did not have full permissions. This included items one had built one's self and that were not set to full permissions, which happened rather a lot as the default set of permissions was the most restrictive set of no modify, no copy, no transfer.

## Avatars

There are two basic types of avatars in Second Life, those which are made by customising the default human avatars, and those which are constructed of prims. In the case of the former, one can easily customise all the physical characteristics of one's avatar including, but not limited to; sex, height, body shape, muscle tone, clothing, hair and facial detail by using the inbuilt appearance editor (see figure 8). This is user customized content, but the appearance editor also allows residents to upload their own textures and skins. I feel that this being done, it becomes user created content. The appearance editor contains an amazing array of options and is one of the most powerful avatar creation tools I know of.

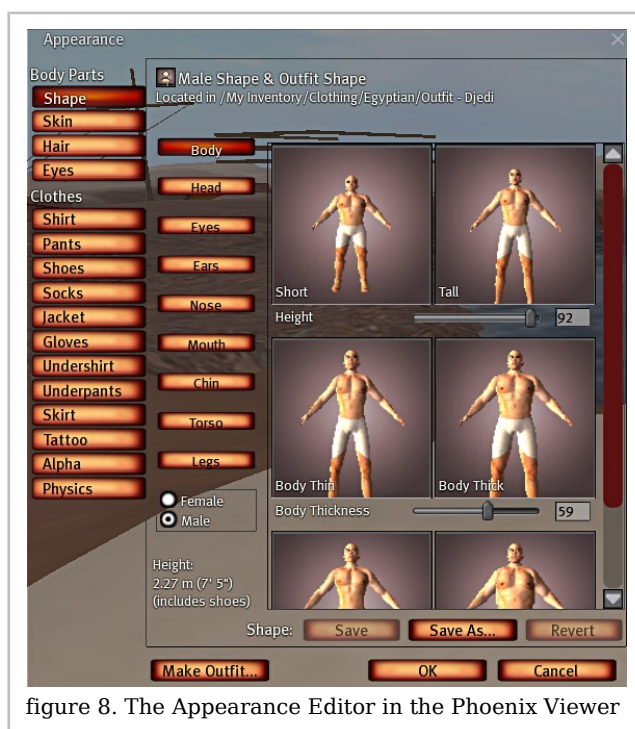


figure 8. The Appearance Editor in the Phoenix Viewer

In the case of prim avatars, which are true user created content, one must construct or buy the avatar. A search of the Second Life Marketplace, just one of many websites that offer items for sale for use in Second Life, reveals that there are over ten thousand avatars listed for sale as at February 2011. Residents devote a lot of time and money to the careful creation of their avatar<sup>283 284 285</sup>, in fact, the process of creating one's avatar when one signs up for Second Life is an important part of the process of becoming a resident. The amount of time and effort it takes serves to form an emotional attachment between the person and the avatar<sup>286</sup>, most especially with

avatars that are constructed to look like the human operator. Constructing an

283 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 129.

284 Meadows, M. S., (2007), *I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life*, New Riders, Berkeley, pp. 48-49.

285 Ondrejka, C., (2004), "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse", *New York Law School Law Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 88.

286 Meadows, M. S., (2007), *I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life*, New Riders, Berkeley, pp. 96.

avatar can be a powerful psychological process as “externalizing an aspect of our personality allows us to control that aspect rather than be controlled by it”<sup>287</sup>.

There is another part of the avatar which no one but those of us who look under the hood and fiddle with things think about. This part is called the agent. Strictly speaking the avatar is the graphical representation alone. The agent however is a part of the avatar that has no form. It is the means by which the avatar sends and receives the messages that control the avatar's actions to the server, so that the avatar's actions are represented accurately in the world to others<sup>288</sup>. These messages include such things as the avatar's position in the world, whether or not the avatar is flying, and messages to pay or extract payment. This is important when one is scripting objects which control the avatar, for example animation scripts. It is the script which has agency. The avatar is the means through which one sees that agency in effect in the world. When the avatar is not being controlled by a script but rather by a person it is that person who has agency. The agent is rather like my conception of a soul. A soul is the means by which our physically manifest self can maintain a link to our non manifest self. Information can flow both ways, but our manifest self, like the avatar, may not be aware of these messages travelling in the background of our consciousness.

## Clothing

In the inbuilt appearance editor are options that allow the resident to create a whole variety of what is known as slider clothing. This eponymous clothing is created by adjusting a series of sliders in the appearance editor that control the features of the desired garment. For example the skirt slider allows one to adjust the length, fullness, bustle, and the placement and length of splits.

Prim clothing may also be created and offers greater creative freedom than slider clothing. As some prims may be made flexible, prim clothing allows the creation of flowing garments that move more naturally with the avatar than slider clothing. Moreover using prims one can create accessories such as hats that are not possible using only sliders.

Apparel is easily the largest single category of items for sale in the Second Life Marketplace with over four hundred thousand items listed for sale as at the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2011. It is probably also the largest category of items for sale inworld, although definitive data on this is very hard to obtain as there is no inworld listing of all goods offered for sale.

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287 Meadows, M. S., (2007), *I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life*, New Riders, Berkeley, p. 96.

288 LSL Wiki, *Agent and Avatar*, <http://lslwiki.net/lslwiki/wakka.php?wakka=agentandavatar>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

# Land

While it is completely free to enter and participate in the world (also known as the grid) of Second Life, if one wants a place of one's, land must be paid for. At the time I joined Second Life, and indeed to the present day, Linden Lab advertising consistently exclaims that one can "Buy your own island". Land can be either rented or 'purchased', with 32.6% of residents having done so<sup>289</sup>. Land may be 'owned' or rented by either individuals or a group. There are two basic types of land: mainland and private estate. Mainland forms a large contiguous block while private estates are islands. Both types can be obtained directly from Linden Lab<sup>290</sup>. Landowners may then resell or rent their land to other residents. Once land has been obtained a land use fee, known as tier, is payable on a continuing basis.

Despite its use by Linden Lab, 'purchasing' is a misnomer for the transaction of acquiring land in Second Life. Land 'ownership' is in fact a type of web hosting. One is paying for a server, not rights in any property, and the 'purchase price' is a set up fee. While the normal usage of 'buy' implies a transfer of ownership between parties in return for some kind of consideration, this is not what Linden Lab means at all. "Buy your own island" in fact means 'rent a server'. A block of land in Second Life is a graphical representation of the product of executing code on a server. When one pays money to Linden Lab to "Buy your own island" what actually happens is that one subscribes to a service which allows one access and control the sim running on the server. There is no transfer of ownership. Linden Lab make this quite clear in their Terms Of Service and also depended on this in a court case where they filed papers stating that 'land' was a service and not something users actually owned<sup>291</sup>. Despite this they continue to advertise land "for sale".

"Second Life" is the multi-user online service offered by Linden Lab, including the software provided to you by Linden Lab (collectively, the "Linden Software") and the online environments that support the service, including without limitation: the server computation, software access, messaging and protocols that simulate the Second Life environment (the "Servers"), the software that is provided by Linden Lab and installed on the local computer or other device you use to access the Servers and thereby view or otherwise access the Second Life environment (the "Viewer"), application program interfaces provided by Linden Lab to you for use with Second Life (the "APIs"), and access to the websites and services available from the domain and

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289 Bell, M. W., Castronova, E., Wagner, G. G., (2009), *Surveying the Virtual World: A Large Scale Survey in Second Life Using the Virtual Data Collection Interface (VDCI)*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1418562>. Accessed 01/02/2011.

290 Linden Lab, *Buying Land*, <http://secondlife.com/land/>. Accessed 01/02/2011.

291 Lastowka, G., (2010), *Virtual Justice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 17.



subdomains of <http://secondlife.com> (the "Websites"). The Servers, Viewer, APIs, Websites and any other Linden Software collectively constitute the "Service" as used in this Agreement.<sup>292</sup>

If a resident fails to pay their tier the land will be removed by Linden Lab. Inter-resident purchases of private estates are complicated by the fact that ownership of the estate is not transferable to the subsequent party, as far as Linden Lab is concerned the estate always belongs to the original resident. Any subsequent transfer of land requires that the resident pay their tier to the original landowner who in turn remits payment to Linden Lab. If they should fail to do so the new 'owner' has no recourse to anyone. Linden Lab steadfastly refused to mediate in these kinds of disputes. In fact Linden Lab will not take any part in disputes between residents of any nature whatsoever<sup>293</sup>, preferring to let residents utilise the mechanisms of nation state laws, such as initiating legal action or by means of the procedures laid out in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act(DCMA). Because such mechanisms are either too expensive, as in the case of the former, or not available, as is the case for non US citizens with the latter option, to all residents or easily abused<sup>294</sup> residents have no choice but to make their own remedies.

If one obtains land from Linden Lab one will have full rights to landscape that land. Landscaping means that it is possible to texture, subdivide and raise or lower the land in relation to the surrounding land or ocean with a great deal of control. One can create mountains and rivers, can flatten, smooth, roughen or change the surface texture of the land, e.g. make it desert or meadows. There is a permissions system that allows the landowner to control who can effect landscaping.

Each portion of land has a set number of prims it can support, which is normally 15,000 prims for each 256m x 256m block. This is an arbitrary limit set by Linden Lab. Many OpenSimulator regions support many more prims.

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292 Second Life Wiki, *Linden Lab Official:Terms of Service Archive/Through 29 April 2010*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Linden\\_Lab\\_Official:Terms\\_of\\_Service\\_Archive/Through\\_29\\_April\\_2010](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Linden_Lab_Official:Terms_of_Service_Archive/Through_29_April_2010), Accessed 02/04/2014.

293 Second Life Knowledge Base, *Transactions and disputes between Residents*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/English-Knowledge-Base/Transactions-and-disputes-between-Residents/ta-p/799395>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

294 Electronic Frontier Foundation, (2013), *Unintended Consequences: Fifteen Years under the DMCA*, <https://www EFF.org/pages/unintended-consequences-fifteen-years-under-dmca>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

# Scripting

Second Life provides a limited range of interactivity with objects by default, such as the ability to; pay, buy, open, move, and sit on them, as well as to have them play media. In order to produce more substantial interactivity in one's objects they must be scripted. To this end Second Life includes a state oriented, event driven programming language known as Linden Scripting Language (LSL) which was created by Cory Ondrejka<sup>295</sup>.

Scripting is something that most residents find daunting, and it is much easier to get started if you have some prior programming experience in a language such as C, Java or JavaScript. While there are freely available online resources that document LSL, these are inscrutable for those with no prior coding experience as they presume an understanding of basic programming concepts, such as functions, variables and loops.

LSL is syntactically similar to the C programming language, but unlike C programs, which have a defined point at which execution always commences when the program starts, LSL scripts consist of one or more states, each of which defines what the script will do when one or more events occur. There are thirty five possible events for different occurrences, e.g. when; an avatar touches an object, an object moves or collides with something, a timer elapses, or an avatar (or object) says something via Second Life's chat system<sup>296</sup>.

In the C programming language the ubiquitous 'Hello World' program (the canonical most simple program that can produce some output, which is traditionally used as a first lesson in programming in any language, as it shows the basic syntax of the language) is:

```
main()
{
    printf("Hello, World\n");
}
```

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295 Money, M., (2007), *Was Cory Linden fired, or did he quit?*, <http://www.massively.com/2007/12/11/was-cory-linden-fired-or-did-he-quit/>, Accessed 01/02/2011.

296 LSL Wiki, *Events*, <http://lslwiki.net/lslwiki/wakka.php?wakka=events>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

Each time the above program is run, it outputs the text 'Hello, World' to the screen. By comparison, the traditional 'Hello Avatar' script in LSL is:

```
default
{
    state_entry()
    {
        llSay(0, "Hello, Avatar!");
    }

    touch_start(integer total_number)
    {
        llSay(0, "Touched.");
    }
}
```

When this script is first saved or initialised, it will print the text 'Hello, Avatar!' in local chat, where any avatar within a twenty metre radius of the object to which this script is attached will see this message. Further, if any avatar touches the object to which this script is attached, it will print 'Touched' in local chat. The difference between the LSL example and the C example is that once the C program is run it immediately prints the text and then ends, while in the LSL example once the script is added to an object it sits in its default state waiting for an interaction to be initiated by an avatar before the output will occur. After this the script does not end, but rather returns to its default state waiting for another interaction.

LSL scripts are capable of a wide range of functionality. They can be used to manipulate the objects to which they are attached, e.g. changing the rotation angle, position, size or texture. Texture animation is possible, and scripts can also be used to create particle emitters, which are used for effects such as smoke or rain. The sending of messages to other objects, or to avatars, or speaking via the local chat channel is widely used, often in the form of greeters. These give messages to avatars, usually a welcome or an explanation of rules. Scripts can even send email messages and make requests to web servers outside of Second Life.

The detection of when an avatar sits on an object facilitates teleport functionality, as well as avatar animation. This latter feature is used in Second Life for the creation of poseballs or danceballs, small spheres that an avatar can sit on, or click, which animate the avatar. Another application is vehicles. LSL includes functions for making objects behave like various types of vehicle (car, plane, boat, etc.) so that when an avatar sits on a vehicle object, the arrow keys that usually control the avatar instead pilot the vehicle.

It is also possible to write LSL scripts that create self-replicating objects. For example Bourke<sup>297</sup> used LSL to build 3D fractals, by writing a script that would rezz many spheres in a fractal pattern. This can be a powerful educational tool, but it has also seen abuse in the past, in the form of so called "grey goo" attacks<sup>298</sup>, where self-replicating objects overrun the landscape.

In the above mentioned "Hello Avatar" script, there is one state, named default. When in the default state, this script will respond to the state\_entry and touch\_start events. However, it is possible to define multiple states, with different event handlers. This is useful for scripting things like doors, where the states in the script naturally reflect the states of the inworld object. In the case of a door, these states would be defined as default (closed) and open, or perhaps; default (closed), opening, open and closing, for a slow-moving door. Cox and Crowther "are doubtful that the added complexity of state based processing is worth the effort"<sup>299</sup>, but the present author disagrees. States in LSL are used where one might be forced to use global variables and 'if' statements in other programming languages. This state-based syntax makes interactive scripts easier for the programmer to understand and debug, e.g. "If my door is open, I can easily see it responds to these events".

## Examples Of What Is Possible

As a content creator I have focused on interactivity: the world is so much more engaging if one can interact with it rather than just look at it. My experience of Second Life is that most of the content has no or limited interactivity. The most recent data at hand regarding the percentage of users who create content is Ondrejka's<sup>300</sup> paper which states that 42% of Second Life users have created objects, that 44% have sold an object and 77% have bought an object. My experience clearly indicates that many more residents can build than can script. I estimate that fewer than 10% of residents can script, probably much fewer.

One key thing that has allowed me to create interesting content is the method of creating several simple objects with simple behaviours and combining them together to create something that exhibits apparent complexity. The following section examines some of my creations, starting with simple doors and moving on to objects of increasingly greater complexity.

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297 Bourke, P., (2009), "Evaluating Second Life for the Collaborative Exploration of 3D Fractals", *Computers & Graphics*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 113-117.

298 Lemos, R., (2006), *Second life plagued by 'grey goo' attack*, [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/11/24/secondlife\\_greygoo\\_attack/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/11/24/secondlife_greygoo_attack/), Accessed 08/02/2014.

299 Cox, R., Crowther, P.. (2008), "A Review of Linden Scripting Language and its Role in Second Life", *ICCMSN'08 Proceedings of the First international conference on Computer-Mediated Social Networking*, pp. 35-47.

300 Ondrejka, C., (2004), "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse", *New York Law School Law Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1.

## Doors

Doors are one of the simplest and most common types of interactive object in Second Life. Typically doors are a single prim with a script on them which will rotate the door around a specified axis when it is touched. A resident touches an object by clicking it with the mouse. A simple example of an LSL door script follows. Lines beginning with "//" are comments, describing what the script does.

```
default
{
    touch_start(integer n)
    {
        // In the default state, when touched, move
        // the door 1.0 metre along its X axis, and
        // transition to the "open" state:
        llSetPos(llGetPos() + <1.0, 0.0, 0.0>);
        state open;
    }
}

state open
{
    touch_start(integer n)
    {
        // In the open state, when touched, move
        // the door 1.0 metre in the opposite direction
        // along its X axis, and transition to the
        // default state:
        llSetPos(llGetPos() - <1.0, 0.0, 0.0>);
        state default;
    }
}
```

As can be seen from this example, it requires only one line of code to open the door and another to close it. The remaining code defines two states, and declares that when the door is in either state (default or open) that the script will execute a particular action when touched. Complexity can be added to, for example, make the door open more smoothly, afford access control, control the amount of time it takes for the door to open or how long it remains open.

This simple type of interaction lends itself to a variety of applications other than doors. An example of a slightly more complex application of this same basic action is The Big Red Button. I created a large, round, red button object, with a script which, when touched, first makes the button glow to indicate activation, next moves the button prim down into its base to indicate the button being depressed, then sends a message (a text string) to the door (a separate object) to tell it to open. This is the equivalent of touching the door. When the button is touched again, or after a predetermined delay, the script

turns off the glow, raises the button and sends another text string to the door telling it to close. These basic principles can be extended to afford the development of a complete inworld home automation system.

Although this kind of implementation seems quite simple, it is beyond the skills of most residents of Second Life to implement from scratch. Even if they are not able to manage complete creation of this kind of interaction, users who have no scripting skills can add pre-made scripts to objects by dragging them from their inventory and dropping them into objects. There is a market in pre-made scripts, with over four thousand scripts being offered for sale on the Second Life Marketplace as at the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2011. I have a business in the world and my partner and I make a range of items, including many scripts which we offer for sale. We receive a great deal of feedback from our customers that they value these scripts as we include detailed, easy to understand instructions that enable even very inexperienced users to understand and customise these scripts. My experience is that most scripts offered for sale in Second Life provide no explanation of any kind of how they work, or are sold with the permissions set so that the user cannot even view the script, let alone edit it. Sales of scripts that users cannot view are obviously a serious impediment to residents who wish to learn how scripts work. Because of this and because of their desire to resell or freely share their creations users prefer to purchase full permission scripts. There is obviously a tension between residents who seek to educate themselves and those who want to include scripts in objects for distribution on the one hand, and the mindset of those scripters who feel they have to prevent users from viewing their scripts in order to ensure sales on the other. My experience, on the contrary, is that my business continues to sell a great many full permission scripts year after year. It is however also important to bear in mind that a great many users have no plans to sell the items they make, but rather enjoy giving them away freely.

## New Kingdom Chariot With Horses

Figure 9 shows a New Kingdom chariot pulled by two horses that my partner and I constructed. The chariot comes in three pieces; the chariot, the right horse and the left horse, which includes the harness. The chariot is a vehicle and the horses and harness ordinary grouped objects. Making the chariot a vehicle means that it is a physical object, that is, an object that interacts with the inworld physics system. By default objects do not have this interaction. It must be discreetly set. Additionally a vehicle contains a number of automated behaviours, among them are; deflection of linear and angular velocity to preferred axis of motion, asymmetric angular and linear friction, hovering over terrain or water or at a global height, banking on turns, linear and angular motor for push and turning<sup>301</sup>. A vehicle can be comprised of no more

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301 Second Life Wiki, *Linden Vehicle Tutorial*,  
[http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Linden\\_Vehicle\\_Tutorial](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Linden_Vehicle_Tutorial). Accessed 08/02/2014.



than 32 prims<sup>302</sup>, which is quite limiting when one wants to make a complex object that has many parts that move in many directions, like a horse's limbs. In order to activate a vehicle one sits on it, at which time the arrow keys control the motion of the vehicle.

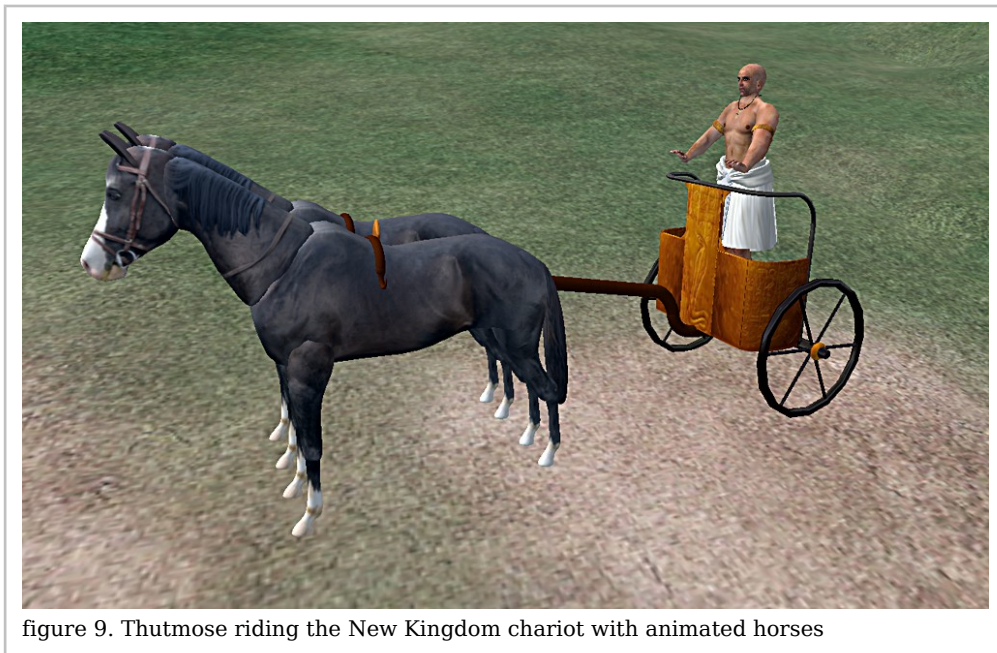


figure 9. Thutmose riding the New Kingdom chariot with animated horses

In the case of the chariot, one sits on the chariot and then wears the horses. To wear an object means to attach it to a point on one's avatar's body. Doing this allows one to work around the 32 prim limit for vehicles. The chariot is comprised of 24 prims, the right horse 13 prims (head, ears [the two ears being one object], neck, body, an upper and a lower half for each leg and a tail, while the left horse, including the harness is 35 prims. Once one sits on the chariot, which in this case arranges one in a standing position, the chariot offers the avatar the horses, which are contained inside the chariot. The horses are then added to the resident's inventory, from where they are worn. Similarity to the way the sit position is specified the position in which the horses are worn is also specified by the creator. Once the horses have been worn one can use the arrow keys to steer the chariot around. The page up and page down keys will shift the chariot up or down gears respectively, thus varying speed and the ability to move over sloped surfaces.

The next important consideration is to animate the horses so they look as if they are walking. The need to do this is why the horses have to be comprised of so many objects. In LSL it is possible to have a script on one prim send a message to all of the other prims in a linked set of which it is a part. Scripts on those other prims receive the message and can cause actions to occur in repose. In the case of the horse there is a horse brain script, which sends messages to all the other scripts which are on each of the parts of the horse's

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302 Second Life Wiki, *Limits*, <http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Limits>. Accessed 08/02/2014.

body which need to move. The brain script sends a message every 0.3 seconds to the other parts of the horse and when they receive it a walking state is entered and they each move a predetermined distance or direction in either the x,y or z axes. This same functionality is employed in order to have the chariot tell its wheels to rotate either forwards or backwards once movement commences.

The chariot also needs to communicate with the horses in order to tell them to move forwards or backwards or to stop. Because the chariot is not part of the same lined set as the horses a different mechanism must be used to allow them to communicate. Second Life includes the facility for about 4 billion communication channels. Among these are the local chat channel and a debug channel for error messages. Each channel has a number to identify it, with local being designated 0 and the debug channel being 2147483647. A resident can select a channel in their script by specifying any other number than these two. If an avatar says something and doesn't specify a channel the message will go to the local channel. In a script however one must specify a number for the channel. For example the chariot sends messages to the horses on channel number 41138. The scripts in the horse's body parts tell them to listen on this channel.

As can be imagined from the description of this process, creating such animations is an incredibly time consuming activity. I estimate we spent about 50 hours in building, coding and testing the chariot. First all the objects have to be built, which includes research into, in this case, the exact form a New Kingdom chariot took. I built the chariot and its harness from prims from scratch. The horses were custom built by another resident who specialises in making animals and my partner and I worked on the scripts together. This is a typical method for constructing complex objects in Second Life. Many of the individual components are complex in their own right and require a well developed skill set to produce them. The horses were made of sculpted prims, a process which requires an external 3D modelling program. The scripts are among the most complex found in the world, my partner is a professional software engineer, and I a multimedia developer. My partner and I have undertaken several large and complex builds in the world and working this way has proven to be the most efficient way to obtain the best result in the least time.

## Why Are Residents So Driven To Create?

Castronova states that "Since 2004 the cost of game design has been rising more rapidly than sales"<sup>303</sup>. He was not the only one<sup>304</sup> to find this at that time, and the situation has continued since then with 2009 seeing many game

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303 Castronova, E., (2007), *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 59.

304 Walton, G., (2003), *Online Worlds Roundtable #8*, <http://rpgvault.ign.com/articles/455/455832p2.html>. Accessed 01/02/2011.



studio closures<sup>305</sup>. Because; there are vastly more users than developers, content creation is labour intensive and, as Ondrejka says, “developers are in a race they cannot possibly win as they try to stay ahead of the users who choose to commoditise their games’ content and currency”<sup>306</sup> the obvious solution is to involve users in content creation, which is exactly what Second Life has done. The Linden Lab website claimed in 2007 that at least fifty users of Second Life were generating in excess of \$8,000 a month<sup>307</sup>. Today there are many thousands of users creating and selling content.

But how does one motivate users to create content? Why would they pay for access to the virtual world and accept that they have to create it themselves? Second Life solved this problem by making access to the world free, granting residents rights in their creations and providing a marketplace for those creations. Despite its early advertising emphasizing that users would have full rights to the content they created Linden Lab have now done a complete about face and altered the terms of service to specify that they have a wide range of rights over residents creations. While Linden Lab originally instituted the permissions system at the behest of professional content creators, these new Terms of Service have seen large numbers of professional content creators leaving Second Life as the new rights Linden Lab have given themselves include the right to distribute content created by residents of Second Life “... for any purpose whatsoever in all formats, on or through any media, software, formula or medium now known or hereafter developed.”<sup>308</sup>. These professional content creators have moved to more open worlds, for example Hosoi Ichiba, a long time well regarded content creator in Second Life moved to Kitely<sup>309</sup> when it opened its marketplace in 2013. Second Life is a fun economy, but Linden Lab's recent actions are removing the fun. With the removal of much high quality content from Second Life residents are voting with their feet and moving to more open worlds where such strictures do not obtain and the content that used to be available in Second Life is now available<sup>310</sup>.

The primary motivation of most residents is to have fun. That they can sell their creations is a bonus. Of course there are those who have entered Second Life with the express purpose of income generation, but this is not the case for the vast majority of residents. While establishing accurate numbers of residents in Second Life is problematic because Linden Lab declines to

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305 Takahashi, D., (2009), *As video game sales lag, heads begin to roll*, <http://venturebeat.com/2009/12/11/with-sales-lagging-heads-begin-to-roll-in-the-video-game-industry/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

306 Ondrejka, C., (2004), "Escaping the Gilded Cage: User Created Content and Building the Metaverse", *New York Law School Law Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 96.

307 Lastowka, G., (2010), *Virtual Justice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 15.

308 Korolov, M., (2013), *Outrage grows over new Second Life terms*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2013/09/outrage-grows-over-new-second-life-terms/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

309 Kitely, *Get Your Own Virtual World*, <http://www.kitely.com/>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

310 Korolov, M., (2014), *Grid Activity Down Slightly in January*, <http://www.hypergridbusiness.com/2014/01/grid-activity-down-slightly-in-january/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

publish accurate figures<sup>311</sup>, there were approximately 1,400,000 logged in in any given 60 day period in 2009<sup>312</sup> while for the same period only 65,000 residents had a positive monthly income<sup>313</sup>.

Certainly residents want fun but another important factor is that they want to be able to control their environments. They want to be free. Freedom is fun. Referring to Huizinga's<sup>314</sup> argument that play is freedom, Harambam et al.<sup>315</sup> argue that the perfect game is one which provides ultimate freedom to its players. Others agree; "Good virtual worlds allow people to be whatever they want to be"<sup>316</sup>, "The intrinsic need for autonomy is what fuels the player's hunger for more freedom in games, and why games that provide freedom and open-ended game play are so highly valued"<sup>317</sup>, "One of the great joys of a virtual world like Second Life is the ability to indulge in fantasy limited only by our own patience and skills with the tools"<sup>318</sup>. Second Life is the present day exemplar of such freedom. No other virtual world allows the same level of freedom to create, the freedom to have fun.

I have discovered that users are motivated to create their own content by a desire for freedom, but that their belief that they must control their creations in order to profit from them does not extend that same freedom to others. Freedom, it seems, has limits, and those limits are bounded by money. Users might want to be free to create as they like, including using the creations of others to remix into new creations, but there is a distinct split personality exhibited when it comes to profit. While it was my experience that most users prefer to purchase full permission items, many then find themselves inclined to distribute their items with restrictive permissions. Even those who have incorporated full permission items created by others into their new creations often lock down the permissions when they go to sell these new creations. The market did sort a lot of this out though, for example, those who tried to sell restricted permission items specifically marketed as building components, e.g. textures, seldom sold many units.

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311 Rolph, S., (2007), *The phony economics of Second Life*, [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/02/20/second\\_life\\_analysis/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/02/20/second_life_analysis/), Accessed 08/02/2014.

312 Nino, T., (2011), *Recent Residents*, <http://dwellonit.taterunino.net/sl-statistical-charts>, Accessed 04/08/2009.

313 Au, W. J., (2010), *50 Second Life Avatars Grossed US\$100,000+ Each From the Second Life Economy in 2009!*, <http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2010/01/the-big-sl-50.html>, Accessed 01/02/2011.

314 Huizinga, J., (1950), *Homo Ludens*, Beacon Press, Boston.

315 Harambam, J., Aupers, S., Goutman, D., (2009), "The Quest for the Ultimate Game: World of Warcraft, Second Life and the Commercialization of Virtual Game Worlds", *Sociologie*, Vol. 5, No. 1.

316 Bartle, R. A., (2004), *Designing Virtual Worlds*, New Riders Publishers, Berkeley, p. 174.

317 Rigby, S., Ryan, R., (2007), *Rethinking Carrots: A New Method for Measuring What Players Find Most Rewarding and Motivating About Your Game*, p. 3, [http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20070116/rigby\\_01.shtml](http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20070116/rigby_01.shtml), Accessed 08/02/2014.

318 Harambam, J., Aupers, S., Goutman, D., (2009), "The Quest for the Ultimate Game: World of Warcraft, Second Life and the Commercialization of Virtual Game Worlds", *Sociologie*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 7.

It seemed obvious to me that if I wanted to be able to continue to avail myself of full permission components in the construction of my items I should in turn sell full permission items, and I do indeed sell full permission scripts. However some of the items I sell are offered with restricted permissions and there are good reasons for this. Residents with little experience building items can inadvertently destroy those items if they have full permissions. Then they come to the content creator seeking support, or, and sadly this is more likely, they simply write negative feedback. In order to avoid such inexperience driven destruction I offer some complex items with restricted permissions in order to prevent the purchaser from editing them and rendering them non functional. However I also offer those items as full permission items with a note advising purchasers that should they destroy those items it is their own responsibility. This doesn't always stop them from complaining once they have broken a full permissions item however. Another reason used for restricting permissions was so that those who only needed a single item for their own use, say a house, could obtain a substantial discount from the price charged to those who wanted multiple copies and were, for example, setting up rental properties in a community and using those houses to make money. To this end it was a common practice for merchants to sell two versions of an item, for example, one 'copy' and one 'no copy'. In a world where items have to be individually constructed, and require materials for that construction, this makes perfect sense. But it is hard to see a supporting rationale in a virtual world, where nothing at all needs to be done, and no materials are required, for an additional copy to be supplied. The only argument seems to be that the artificial scarcity applied to the 'no copy' item makes it less valuable than a 'copy' item. Seeing as there is no cost, or loss, to the builder, for the extra copies it just seems greedy to add this restriction. Interestingly, this means that value works in the opposite way in the world than in meatspace. In the world things that have less scarcity, i.e. are able to be copied, attract a higher price than more scarce, i.e. not able to be copied, items.

Money in Second Life is Linden dollars. One United States dollar converts to approximately two hundred and sixty Linden dollars (L\$). This exchange rate has been relatively constant for some time<sup>319 320</sup>. A complete outfit for an avatar can be purchased for L\$300. A block of land sufficient to install a large house on can be rented for around L\$600 a week. A good quality house can be purchased for L\$500. A few U.S. dollars go a very long way.

Despite all the hype about burgeoning entrepreneurs in the Linden dollar economy, there is a huge amount of user created content offered completely free in Second Life. A large number of residents make content and give it away for free because it is fun to see other people use the things one creates. However the highest quality items are usually not free.

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319 Linden Lab, *Buy L\$,* <https://secondlife.com/my/lindex/buy.php?#data>, Accessed 14/06/2009.

320 Linden, N. (2011), *The Second Life Economy in Q4 2010*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Featured-News/The-Second-Life-Economy-in-Q4-2010/ba-p/674618>, Accessed 02/01/2011.

The tension between libre and gratis is most clearly seen in the fear of not gaining the greatest possible financial benefit from one's creations that has driven the desire for a permissions system on the part of some content creators. But given that; the great majority of content creators in Second Life are not earning very much at all from the sale of their content<sup>321</sup>, the limitations the permissions system places on building, the vast quantity of free goods available and, most importantly, the ease of subverting the permissions system, why insist on the existence of the system? It seems the needs of the few outweigh the needs of the many.

While at law copyright in one's creations vests in the creator, "the problem with much of copyright law is that although it made sense in the context of technology that existed when the law was created, it does not adequately address digital technology"<sup>322</sup>. Because Linden Lab must be aware of the ease with which the permissions system can be subverted, I believe its existence is maintained largely to provide reassurance to content creators.

The permission system creates an analogue of meatspace property rights for virtual objects. But does it work? There is a catch 22 of virtual property. If one wants to sell content to the resident it must be delivered to their computer. Once it is delivered it can be copied. Past experience has shown that technological solutions that attempt to prevent copying do not work<sup>323 324 325</sup>, and do collateral damage that is destructively expensive, as Gutmann puts it "the Vista Content Protection specification could very well constitute the longest suicide note in history"<sup>326</sup>. Yet companies persist in using technological solutions that have been shown not to work, and which incorporate antifeatures, intentionally introduced 'features' that users do not want or benefit from e.g. digital rights management (DRM), into their products<sup>327</sup>.

Are content creators really interested in maintaining control over their creations because this is the only viable business model, or because they are not aware of any alternative models? In a digital world where copying data is not preventable, it makes more sense to allow people to do so than to try to

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321 Au, W. J., (2010), *50 Second Life Avatars Grossed US\$100,000+ Each From the Second Life Economy in 2009!*, <http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2010/01/the-big-sl-50.html>. Accessed 01/02/2011.

322 Fiesler, C., (2008), "Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Fandom: How Existing Social Norms Can Help Shape the Next Generation of User-Generated Content", *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, Vol. 10, p. 760.

323 McAllister, N., (1999), *DVD Encryption Walks the Plank: Is piracy really a threat to digital copy protection?*, <http://www.fatalexception.org/sfgate/1999/19991117.html>. Accessed 08/02/2014.

324 Patrizio, A., (1999), *Why the DVD Hack Was a Cinch*, <http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/1999/11/32263>. Accessed 08/02/2014.

325 Schneier, B., (1999), *DVD Encryption Broken*, <http://www.schneier.com/essay-193.html>. Accessed 08/02/2014.

326 Gutmann, P., (2007), *A Cost Analysis of Windows Vista Content Protection*, [http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/~pgut001/pubs/vista\\_cost.html](http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/~pgut001/pubs/vista_cost.html). Accessed 08/02/2014.

327 Hill, B., M., (NDP), *Antifeatures*, <http://wiki.mako.cc/Antifeatures>. Accessed 08/02/2014.

prevent them, unless you want to make your customer your enemy. Any attempts to stop copying ultimately waste the time and energy of the creator and annoy paying customers. Sound business models based on fewer restrictions do exist<sup>328 329 330 331 332</sup>.

Many merchants in Second Life have realised the importance of loss leaders as a marketing tool and it is a widely accepted reality that one needs to have at least one freebie item in one's shop, and that this will drive traffic and thus increase sales. Another method of utilizing free content to drive sales is what Eric Raymond calls the "Give away the recipe, open a restaurant" model<sup>333</sup>. This model gives content away for free as a method of selling services. Some of the scripts I sell in the world are component parts of complex items I have constructed. Residents buy these scripts planning to build their own items, but they often can't get the result they desire, and then they come to me seeking help. While I do provide quite a bit of free support to customers, I sometimes have to draw the line and tell them that if they want more help they will have to pay for it, either by paying me for the service of helping them to build their item or by commissioning me to build a bespoke item for them.

Lawrence Lessig released his book "Free Culture" under a Creative Commons license which allowed it to be freely copied, and yet physical copies of the book still sold better than the publisher expected<sup>334</sup>. Cory Doctorow, who allows free digital downloads of his books but charges for physical copies and audio versions, has had similar experiences with his novels; "...making my books available for free increase the number of sales that I get..."<sup>335</sup>. This may seem counterintuitive, but as Doctorow says "Why am I doing this? Because my problem isn't piracy, it's obscurity"<sup>336</sup>. Once obscurity has been overcome the creator can then derive income from selling to the customers that copying has brought to their door. In the same way authors like Doctorow derive income from personal appearances, content creators in Second Life can do so from obtaining commissions.

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328 Doctorow, C., (2008), *Nine Inch Nails made at least \$750k from CC release in two days*, <http://www.boingboing.net/2008/03/05/nine-inch-nails-made.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

329 Dornan, A., (2008), *The Five Open Source Business Models*, <http://www.informationweek.com/applications/the-five-open-source-business-models/d/d-id/1062798?>, Accessed 01/02/2011.

330 Pfahl, M., (2001), "Giving Away Music to Make Money: Independent Musicians on the Internet", *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 8, <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1454/1369>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

331 Raymond, E. S., (1999), *The Magic Cauldron*, <http://catb.org/~esr/writings/magic-cauldron/magic-cauldron.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

332 Stallman, R. M., (2008), *Freedom — or Copyright?*, <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/freedom-or-copyright.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

333 Raymond, E. S., (1999), *The Magic Cauldron*, <http://catb.org/~esr/writings/magic-cauldron/magic-cauldron-9.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

334 Finer, J., (2004), *Download Revolution*, <http://guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1260735,00.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

335 CC Wiki, *Cory Doctorow*, [http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Case\\_Studies/Cory\\_Doctorow](http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Case_Studies/Cory_Doctorow), Accessed 08/02/2014.

336 Doctorow, C., *Makers: Download for Free*, <http://craphound.com/makers/download/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.



If users can freely trade goods it benefits sellers due to increased awareness of sellers as this dissemination creates a wider audience, and it benefits buyers as people prefer to buy full permission items. This is indicated by the fact that objects with full permissions sell for much higher amounts (typically a factor of ten) than limited permission items. As Bakshy, Karrer and Adamic describe, "copyright may inhibit the spread of assets, favoring the spread of those where users are free to share and modify the content"<sup>337</sup>. Many content creators specialise in a particular type of building component and residents often assemble their builds from components sourced from others. Because of this full permission objects are preferred over more restrictive ones. In Second Life, other content creators are far less likely to purchase your creations if they do not get full permissions, because it is then impossible to combine those items into other creations that are likewise destined for sale. Even in the case of textures (for which it is especially easy to circumvent the permission system), content creators will generally ignore textures offered for sale that do not grant full permissions to the purchaser.

I sell full permission scripts in Second Life and find that this brings people to my store who have come to know of me through being given one of my scripts by a friend and who want custom work, or who just want to pay me something as they have been happy with their script. This kind of copying serves as a form of viral marketing, provided the creator's name is preserved. Even the U.S. Copyright Office has stated that attribution can sometimes replace monetary compensation to legitimize an unauthorized use<sup>338</sup> and the US Supreme Court has suggested that copyright law includes protection for an author's interest in receiving credit for their work<sup>339</sup>.

Ultimately, content creators who are unhappy about the ability of others to freely copy their works are going to have to come to terms with their fear and explore new business models. Because of the subvertability of the permissions system and the rise of third-party worlds using the OpenSimulator server software<sup>340</sup> residents are already making copies of full permission items to enable them to transfer their purchases from one world to another. Content creators who embrace their customer's desires will prosper at the expense of those who fight those desires. Being sued is not fun.

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337 Bakshy, E., Karrer, B., Adamic, A., (2009), "Social Influence and the Diffusion of User-Created Content", *Proceedings of the tenth ACM conference on Electronic commerce*, pp. 325-334.

338 U.S. Copyright Office, (2006), *Report on Orphan Works*, Library of Congress, Washington DC, <http://copyright.gov/orphan/orphan-report-full.pdf>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

339 Supreme Court of the United States, (2003), *Dastar Corporation vs. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation* - 539 U.S. 23 (2003), <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/539/23/case.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

340 OpenSimulator, *Main Page*, [http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Main_Page), Accessed 01/02/2011.

### 3. My Life In Ancient Egypt

In the following chapters I will take you on a chronologically ordered retelling of my time in ancient Egypt. I will recount to you the story of my time in this world; day to day interactions, rituals in which I participated, how I came to be a priest and my relations with others. I will include excerpts from my conversations with others, logs of events and a selection of notecards that were widely distributed in the community. Some of these set out the process of becoming a member, some explain how role play worked and some are intercommunity communications.

Some terms used in these notecards and chat excerpts will be unfamiliar to the reader; Out Of Character (OOC) this refers to actions or speech by the avatar rather than the avatar's character, Teleport (TP) instantaneously moving an avatar from one place in the world to another, Instant Message (IM) a private message from one resident to any one other resident, In Character (IC), Role Play (RP), Avatar (avi), What the fuck? (WTF), laugh out loud (LOL), in my humble opinion (IMHO) and 'crash' meaning that the software client used to access the world becomes unstable and the program terminates or that one loses one's connectivity to the internet and thus one's avatar disappears from the world. *Em hotep* (*htp*) is an Egyptian phrase that translates as 'in peace'. It was used as a greeting in the sims and this accounts for its use in this ritual when the participants are welcoming the presence of the goddess. *Senebty* (*snb*) is a Egyptian word which translates as 'health', with an ending which shows a noun form made out of the second person of a verb. So literally it means 'your state of being healthy'. It was used as a farewell in the sims. No one seemed to know how it was that these phrases came to be used. It was a case of "everyone just knows it".

### Dramatis Personae

Before getting into detail about my adventures in the world I am going begin by introducing you to some of the people I shared the world with.

#### Amon

From the first day I met Amon he was in the middle of a leadership drama. This was to be a recurring pattern. Not long after I first met him he became the chief high priest of the temple of Osiris in Ptolemaic Egypt, referred to by the title of Illustrious One. A few days later he sadly informed me that, after a dispute with the vizier, Meresankh, he had stepped down from his role as Illustrious One. He assured me that he had been begged not to resign but that he found it to be the only way he could deal with his conflict with the vizier. I

didn't go into the details of it with him on that occasion as I hadn't known him long, but as time went by I began to see that Amon's life in Second Life was a cycle of him being appointed to some position, having a conflict with someone, resigning his position and waiting for people to ask him to take it up again.

Amon told me he was gay and had a partner who didn't understand his usage of Second Life and with whom he had to negotiate his inworld time. His inworld time was obviously very important to him. The main thing Amon wanted from others in Second Life was respect. His pattern of quitting a position and then having lengthy, repeated emotional conversations with everyone until they assured him they really needed him to return and assume his position evidenced this. But he also put a lot of effort into trying to build the community. He was inworld most of the time, every day. He would be at all the meetings and have some input into everything.

He had a house in another sim outside of Egypt to which he would take any male who turned up. The house was populated with suggestively named poseballs. A poseball is a method of animating avatars. One would see a small ball in the world which the avatar could sit on, which would then carry out whatever animation had been inserted into the ball. Poseballs often came in pairs. One coloured pink and one blue, to indicate the position for the appropriate gender. For example a dancing poseball would have the blue poseball be for the avatar who would lead the dance, while the pink one would follow. Text would often float over the poseball so one could see what the animation attached to it was. Amon had poseballs labelled "suck" and "stand".

Amon was always doing priestly things. I never saw him fighting, or engaging in the ubiquitous combat and capture scenarios. He spent a lot of time initiating new priests. He'd initiate someone within five minutes of their turning up. He loved the rituals and really wanted to get more people into the community. He realised that people preferred fighting and yet wanted to get them into the priesthood. So he set up a priests' army.

Amon: I have set up a new order  
Amon: with Intef  
Thutmose: what kind of order?  
Amon: priest soldiers  
Amon: it may not be needed  
Amon: but  
Amon: I had to do something when the army was moving against us  
Thutmose: they were?  
Amon: now the threat seems to have gone and we have one  
Amon: yes  
Amon: they refused  
Thutmose: wow, no one ever tells me anything  
Amon: to acknowledged the priesthood  
Amon smiles  
Amon: this is the thing Thutmose  
Amon: we need to hold this priesthood together



Amon: so tomorrow night's meeting will be interesting  
 Thutmose: indeed  
 Amon: I think that Seti is saying that if Isis can be in the temple why not Set  
 Amon: for me  
 Amon: I wanted the women to feel comfortable in the priesthood  
 Amon: and he talks of Gnosticism  
 Amon: well  
 Amon: that's all well and fine  
 Amon: but it's just a bit of an assumption  
 Amon: that i'm even spiritual at all  
 Amon: perhaps it's all a huge video game to me  
 Thutmose: everyone is here for different reasons  
 Amon: with cartoon people doing cartoon things  
 Amon: lol  
 Amon: I jest  
 Amon: assumption...well you know  
 Amon grins  
 Amon: an amazing venue...  
 Amon: with incredible potential  
 Thutmose: potential for what though?  
 Amon: depends on your imagination

I was never able to really be sure how he felt about the religious aspects, whether he was seriously interested in the religion, or just saw it as a game. He was interested in learning about the religion of ancient Egypt, but had a view of what a priest was and should do that was based on Christian concepts of priesthood: the priests were there to help people, do good works, minister and spread the word. He wanted to get the priests out into the community doing things for people, things that would make them include the priests more in community activities. He thought that priests spending all their time in the temple doing temple things was not going to ingratiate them to the community, though the priests of ancient Egypt had the temple as their entire focus. He was very sensitive to how the rest of the community saw the priesthood. He had to know everything that was going on. If something happened or some decision was made and he wasn't included there would be emotional repercussions for everybody.

## Berenike

Berenike was a high priestess and the oracle<sup>341</sup> a role she described thus; "I wander around, stoned, saying off the wall stuff that makes people worry". She had been in Egypt for only two weeks when I arrived. Berenike was a devout atheist who kept role playing priestesses. After having played a priestess in Star Wars Galaxies, a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG), prior to her oracle role in Ptolemaic Egypt she subsequently played a priestess again in Nubian Egypt. She liked to discuss

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341 Shafer, B. E. (ed), (1991), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*, Cornell University Press, New York, pp. 170-171.

religion a lot and she wasn't a rabid Dawkins type atheist, so we had many interesting discussions. Seeing uses for religion she was concerned about the effect that the decline of organised religion is having on society.

Berenike: I roleplayed a priestess in Star Wars: Galaxies... and intended on not doing so again.  
Thutmose: why not?  
Berenike: In that game, in that community, I... an atheist... became a true religious figure for many.  
Berenike: that is a very uncomfortable position.  
Berenike: One finds oneself attempting to live up to the expectations.  
Thutmose: lol  
Thutmose: now that's funny  
Berenike: I am a third generation atheist.  
Thutmose: I am the polar opposite of an atheist  
Thutmose: panentheist  
Berenike: /grin, we will have some interesting chats.  
Berenike: Only the "badguys" (who also happened to be the best roleplayers, by the way) could keep the avi separate from the player.  
Berenike: The "goodguys" brought me their real life problems...especially the teenagers.  
Berenike: I have a minor in comparative religions. I tried to stay within the parameters of each person's religion.  
Berenike: These were more serious... most of them.  
Berenike: One questioned his sexuality, but was afraid to go to his priest because of the scandals in the Church. He lived in a single parent home.  
Thutmose: yeah, I have to laugh at the Catholics.  
Thutmose: bad press extraordinaire  
Thutmose: but then I am evil  
Thutmose: :)  
Berenike: They built that particular trap for themselves, and they have to deal with the consequences.  
Berenike: I don't think the Christian churches, in general, are adapting well to this age.  
Thutmose: no they are doomed  
Thutmose: no loss  
Berenike: but, the people are replacing religion with superstition, moral confusion, and just plain laziness in thinking... and the schools are not taking up the slack.  
Berenike: On the other hand... I see more and more parents teaching consequences for one's actions... which gives me a lot of hope for the future.  
Thutmose: indeed the education system here is rubbish  
Berenike: Blame the Boomers.  
Berenike: They are too Carebear...  
Berenike: And bought in to the Age of Aquarius.  
Thutmose: how do you mean?  
Thutmose: re Aquarius i mean  
Berenike: Oh, listen to the song...it celebrates, but what does it celebrate?  
Thutmose: well Aquarius :)  
Thutmose: rationality, individualism  
Thutmose: idiosyncracies  
Thutmose: but also a tendency to self delusion  
Berenike: Mostly just change... but it does not say what kind of change? So the Boomers changed things... they made school easy, they made sex

easy, they made superstition easy... but they did not celebrate hard work, thinking, and most of all... consequences.  
 Thutmose: yup  
 Thutmose: too busy getting stoned and laid  
 Berenike: Yeah.  
 Berenike: And most had parents who got them out of trouble... so that they didn't have to deal with consequences.  
 Thutmose: and we their children were given so much freedom that most learned no self discipline  
 Berenike: Precisely.  
 Thutmose: and now we have the second generation from baby boomers who have been brought up by parents with no self discipline and you get kids who don't even know self discipline exists  
 Thutmose: and who think to discriminate means a bad thing  
 Berenike: LOL!

Berenike was always keen to learn, which is one reason she was in the priesthood. She would do research and was a valuable participant in the priests' meetings. Despite her atheism, she had a good knowledge of the gods of Egypt and was a driving force in the priesthood. We formed a good relationship quite quickly and worked together well, our shared interest in religion being the basis of our many indepth conversations. She had quite fixed notions of what a religion should be and didn't have any time for "made up religions". Although she didn't think they were "made up religions" she was not a fan of the Abrahamic religions either. The idea that some religions are 'made up' is frequently offered as an argument against new religions<sup>342</sup>, or new expressions of religion, and is essentially the same argument used to attack virtual worlds as 'not real'. It is thus doubly interesting to the subject at hand, that of religion in virtual worlds. I am not persuaded by this argument and see it rather as simply a preferencing of what is seen as the normal state of affairs. Western society has been for so long under the reign of the Abrahamic religions that conceptions of what constitutes a real religion are measured against the tenets of those religions<sup>343</sup>. Similarly the ontological status of virtual worlds is questioned simply because they afford a new way of being.

Berenike was also one of the few people I knew who was able to avoid the conflation of role play issues with OOC issues. This was to be a recurring issue. One particular ongoing problem of this nature was caused by a priestess who was recruiting for her meatspace religion in the community. She continually tried to bend the shape of the religion in the world to match her meatspace religion. She had been initiated into the priesthood by Seti and was assigned to be my *hem netjer* (a rank of priest of which more explanation will be given later) and, as such, it was my responsibility to teach her about Egyptian religion. The first I knew about this OOC/role play crossover of hers was when she came to me and told me that Egyptian religion had serial reincarnation. My discussion with Berenike about this led to a fascinating discussion about "made up religions", from which it became clear that she

342 Cusack, C., (2010), *Invented Religions*, Ashgate, Farnham, p. 142.

343 Cusack, C., (2010), *Invented Religions*, Ashgate, Farnham, p. 147.

didn't only include in this category the kind of self consciously and self admittedly created religions that Cusack<sup>344</sup> describes as invented religions - The Church of All Worlds, Discordiansim and their like - but rather any religion that wasn't begun by an act of divine command or inspiration, but was deliberately created by a small group of people. Her inclusion of Islam in this group is puzzling given its derivation from an explicit divine revelation.

Thutmose: my miserable hem netjer tried to tell me that there was reincarnation in Egyptian religion  
Berenike: What???  
Thutmose: and when I said, nope, just the one lifetime then go to the Du'at to live with the gods she told me I was wrong.  
Berenike: I have seen absolutely nothing that indicated any such belief.  
Thutmose: She said the temple of Isis taught reincarnation and that "That must be well known to one as wise as you".  
Thutmose: so I said where is this temple?  
Berenike: Oh, its in RL.  
Thutmose: And then she went on to say it was on the island temple of Philae.  
Berenike: It is another made up religion like Wicca and the masons.  
Thutmose: careful dear, your prejudices are showing  
Thutmose: all things are one - IMHO  
Berenike: Well, they were... and so was Ba'hai... that doesn't make them any less religions.  
Thutmose: All religions where made up by humans  
Berenike: We just have documentation on their origins.  
Thutmose: It seems to me that the thing all religions call god is the same thing  
Berenike: They didn't grow, like most religions.  
Thutmose: Just given different names by most cultures  
Thutmose: Wicca did grow...  
Thutmose: Wicca from western magical societies like the Golden Dawn  
Berenike: Yes, once their founders died.  
Thutmose: and freemasonry from medieval guilds, but it's not a religion.  
Berenike: Oh, no, freemasonry was made up during Napoleonic times.  
Thutmose: what about the Baha'i?  
Berenike: Another "made up religion" that has a lot to be said for it. I have come to admire the Baha'i that I have met.  
Thutmose: define "made up religion"  
Berenike: Any religion that has, as its source, a few people deliberately putting together a belief system... and which has not yet had time to mutate.  
Berenike: Islam was a made up religion, at first... it no longer is.  
Berenike: It's hard to tell about Christianity... it appears to have been organic.  
Thutmose: bah!  
Thutmose: Christianity was organic until Paul of Tarsus got involved  
Thutmose: from then on it was contrived  
Berenike: LOL  
Thutmose: all religions are made up  
Berenike: I think most Pagan religions were organic.  
Berenike: in origin...  
Thutmose: all religions are languages that humans use to describe the divine  
Berenike: But, this Isis sect, it is way too young to have become

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344 Cusack, C., (2010), *Invented Religions*, Ashgate, Farnham.

organic.  
 Thutmose: as such we 'made them up'  
 Thutmose: which Isis sect?  
 Berenike: The one Cleopatra belongs to... it has only been around maybe 25 years.  
 Berenike: At the most.  
 Thutmose: ah ok  
 Thutmose: well if it is using Isis then it is organic, if I understand what you mean by organic  
 Thutmose: it has grown  
 Thutmose: and if it incorporates Isis and reincarnation then it is definitely not just a revival  
 Berenike: No, the founders are still alive... it is a splinter of the White Goddess group.  
 Thutmose: whats the white goddess group? Like Robert Graves' White Goddess?  
 Berenike: Yes, lol!  
 Thutmose: well as I see it every religions builds on the religions before it  
 Thutmose: it is like everything humans do  
 Thutmose: we look at what is around us and try to form our own understanding of it  
 Thutmose: and to express it in a way that makes sense in our culture  
 Berenike: Well, I am worried about the number of cults arising in the last 25 years that have a dependence on magic... and showing an increasing lack of knowledge of science.  
 Thutmose: why?  
 Berenike: First off... what about science disproves the existence of a god? Nothing.  
 Berenike: For the Christians, the fundamentalists... why are they afraid of learning about the wonders of creation?  
 Thutmose: because their whole religion operates on fear  
 Berenike: /nod  
 Thutmose: and because monotheism is driven by categories of exclusion  
 Thutmose: they feel if they can prove everyone else is wrong, then they must be right  
 Thutmose: which is really sad  
 Berenike: And, I have noticed that many Europeans and Americans who claim to be atheists are "Christian atheists".  
 Berenike: They are not really atheists... they are rebels against their own religion.  
 Thutmose: how do you mean?  
 Berenike: Mostly they are angry at the institutions of Christianity... they sneer only at Christianity, not at Islam except in that it is related. They do not sneer at Buddhism or Shinto, or any of the other religions.  
 Berenike: Just Christianity.  
 Berenike: and more particularly at the section of it that they come from.  
 Thutmose: of course  
 Berenike: Catholic, Baptist, Lutheranism, which ever.  
 Thutmose: it is easy to see the failings of a thing that is around one all the time.

Discussions such as this were another reason Berenike was in Second Life. Her circumstances meant she couldn't get out of her home much. I deduced from our conversations that she was probably in her sixties, for example she

told me her father had been drafted into WWII when he was 32 years old. Berenike told me she lived with her husband who had an acquired brain injury and who she had to care for constantly. She also told me she worked, though not full time. Certainly she was in the world a great deal of the time. Often most of her night time as well as the day time hours. Berenike was clearly an intelligent person and wanted to talk to others who were capable of interesting conversation, though she also enjoyed gossip. Although I spent most of my time oblivious to the political intrigues going on around me, unless they immediately concerned me, she always knew exactly who was doing what to whom and why. She knew all the gossip. When others were getting upset about politics she would be a calm voice of reason. Usually. Once she did get upset she was vociferous.

Berenike hated Gor. When she first joined Ptolemaic Egypt she discovered that the owner and Pharaoh was heavily into Gor as he tried to treat her as a Gor female. She claimed that 90% of the women in Ptolemaic Egypt were into Gor. Most of them did indeed choose to dress in the typical dress of Gor slaves, known as silks, an outfit which was comprised of thin strips of cloth hanging from a flimsy belt, and which covered nothing of the body. It was a full time preoccupation of Berenike's to try to get the female avatars to dress as Egyptians instead of as Gor slaves, without much success. She worked ceaselessly to try to get them to not behave like the obsequious victims that Gorean slaves are, but rather as Egyptian women, who enjoyed equal status with men. Countering her efforts was the fact that these apparently women enjoyed being slaves, they seemed to want to be totally dominated by men.

Thutmose: I just had this hem netjer practically have a nervous breakdown because I told her not to be so obsequious.  
Berenike: Which one?  
Thutmose: Cleopatra  
Berenike: I should slap her silly.  
Berenike: She is an intelligent woman.  
Thutmose: she seems to be  
Thutmose: but there is something going on there  
Berenike: She is a Gorean. I hate Gor, I hate Gor, I hate Gor.  
Thutmose: ditto, ditto, ditto  
Thutmose: :)  
Thutmose: I told her to hold her head up and be a good example to the people of egypt  
Thutmose: and she burst into tears.  
Thutmose: I mean ..  
Thutmose: wtf  
Berenike: Let me speak with her.  
Thutmose: she came in yesterday  
Thutmose: with a mural for the temple wall  
Thutmose: and was all, "if my pathetic efforts may be considered good enough"  
Thutmose: so I told her it was good and then I asked her about the gods depicted in the mural  
Thutmose: and she didn't know who they were  
Thutmose: so I asked her how she had made it if she didn't even know their names

Thutmose: and then she said she didn't make the images, just the mural object

Thutmose: so I told her it was a nice mural, which it is, and that she should learn a bit about the gods

Thutmose: and she went all "I am so worthless" on me

Berenike: lol

Thutmose: and today she sought me out for a talk

Thutmose: and spoke for about half and hour and pussyfooted about

Thutmose: and wouldn't get to the point

Thutmose: and then when I tried to get her to spit it out she just burst into tears and left

Thutmose: \*shrug\*

Thutmose: I was nice and everything

Thutmose: honestly

Thutmose: very, very patient and nice

Berenike: shit... I knew Gor dehumanized the men, but wasn't really aware of the damage it was doing to the women.

Berenike: Now, I have worked hard to get Horemheb to not treat me like a bar wench... which is his initial reaction to all females in this game.

Thutmose: lol

Thutmose: that's really interesting about Horemheb

Thutmose: I haven't seen that side of him

Berenike: Oh? I thought it was well known that he is a lech.

Thutmose: well maybe I am not his type

Berenike: We have already had the "you should come to Gor" discussion.

Thutmose: oh dear

Berenike: I will NOT participate in an activity that encourages men to become subhuman.

Thutmose: lol

Berenike: Which BDSM does.

Thutmose: I used to think it might be a good thing to be able to role play stuff like that but

Thutmose: having seen the results

Thutmose: it really doesn't get it out of people's system

Thutmose: it just makes it worse

Berenike: Precisely. I used to be more open minded about that... but I have seen too much of the results.

Berenike: And the first time I saw Cleopatra, she was in silks... and behaving in a sub manner.

Thutmose: oh dear

Thutmose: we did issue a clothing guide for priestesses

Thutmose: because too many of the were running around in silks

Berenike: The only person I have seen in silks who didn't act like a sub, is Repytub... and she says she has never been in Gor past one hour.

Berenike: almost 90% of the female applicants to this sim are Gor players...

Thutmose: oh dear

Berenike: I don't know if that reflects on the female population of SL or on the sim... I suspect the latter.

Thutmose: well that explains some of the strange reactions I get from some females here...

Berenike: Ahhh, Thutmose, you make me feel like a sophisticate.

After the collapse of Ptolemaic Egypt, Berenike was to be the person who drove the process of forming the second community. She rallied people around, got them to come to meetings, promised them the things they wanted



and made sure things got done. Unfortunately, so great was her desire to see a new community formed, she promised conflicting things to people. This was to be the source of much of the tension in the second community.

## Horemheb

Horemheb was a Gorean who founded the Ptolemaic Egypt sims with a couple of friends after a dispute in a Gorean sim that they had all previously had. He soon fell out with them and took over the running of the community himself. He paid for the sims entirely on his own. As there were between six and nine sims at any one time, this represented about USD 1,500 per month. Horemheb was a man's man. He would speak of women as "bitches" and adamantly and frequently referred to how they needed (and liked) to be "kept in line". There was certainly no shortage of female avatars in the sims who, judging by the nature of the activities they undertook with him, and the extremely regular basis on which these activities occurred, clearly concurred with his views.

He said his idea was to have an historically accurate sim, but he wasn't consistent in this goal. One day, as Berenike and I were walking around, we ran into some Vikings. We questioned their presence in Egypt in 300 BCE and they were quite irate when we told them they wouldn't exist for another thousand years. But they assured us they were on a visit from Britannia to see Horemheb and had his permission to be there. Horemheb invariably remained in character in local chat and was a strong advocate of historical accuracy so we were confused. Pondering the historical unlikelihood of their presence in Egypt I went off to seek out Horemheb.

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Thutmose: emhotep
Thutmose: I have to ask about the vikings?
Horemheb: ok
Thutmose: what's the story?
Thutmose: 'cause Berenike and I were a bit shocked yesterday to be
greeted in Egypt by someone claiming she was a viking
Horemheb: Nords lived on Britannia prior to Roman conquest.....they are
Barbarian..... letting them get established.....see if it works, then
tighten up on it
Thutmose: ummmm
Thutmose: Brittania wasn't Brittania until after the Roman invasion
Thutmose: and no vikings for about 1000 years
Horemheb: the native peoples are nordic..... the tribes that are in
britannia, have nordic history
Horemheb: its an island
Horemheb: they didn't grow there
Thutmose: the peoples who lived in Britain before the Romans were
Britains not Norsemen
Horemheb: and where do you think the tribes that are in Britian came
from
Thutmose: well they had been there since the end of the ice age
Thutmose: and during the Iron Age Celts migrated there
Thutmose: and, sure, some people from what we call Scandinavia went
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there, but they weren't vikings at that time  
Thutmose: and then the Romans came in 43AD, but that is after when our RP is set  
Horemheb: and Nords..... they just did some recent artifact and carbon dating sampling of Nordic items on northern coast of Britan.....that predates Roman occupations.....either that or I drink too much  
Horemheb: we have to have a little leeway here, or we will have no other groups on the sim.....just like the Nubians  
Thutmose: Nubians fit the period  
Horemheb: I called them Barbarians..... Egyptians had a name for "Sea Peoples" who are debated but not clearly identified as being one group or another  
Thutmose: they were earlier than our setting  
Thutmose: second century BC  
Thutmose: the thing is we now have people walking around saying they are vikings  
Thutmose: which is just stupid  
Thutmose: I understand about getting more people in  
Horemheb: sighs..... I am letting them get established, we can and will refine their RP.....in truth its an experiment  
Thutmose: I understand  
Thutmose: I am recalling your earlier conversations where you mentioned your requirement for historical accuracy  
Thutmose: which is why I was confused  
Thutmose: if you are going to relax the rules for some you need to relax the rules for others or there will be unhappiness  
Horemheb: Yes..... and I allowed them in as a test.....  
Thutmose: some notice of this would have been nice  
Horemheb: Thutmose.....give it a chance  
Thutmose: Berenike and I nearly got into a fight with a chick yesterday who got majorilly upset when we told her there are no vikings for 1000 years  
Thutmose: I am not hassling you  
Thutmose: IMHO you can have 100% historical accuracy or you can have lots of people  
Thutmose: im 'real' egypt there were many more poor people than nobles and priests  
Horemheb: that's the truth  
Thutmose: but this place is the opposite  
Thutmose: but who wants to play a peasant who just works in the fields all day?  
Horemheb: no one.....  
Thutmose: I am trying to help you get more historical without pushing it too hard  
Thutmose: but if you want help you need good communications  
Thutmose: otherwise we get embarrassing situations like us saying no vikings and then being told you let them in  
Thutmose: Berenike and I were trying in encourage your previously stated policy of historical accuracy  
Horemheb: and I appreciate it.....  
Thutmose: that's all  
Thutmose: I know you want more people and most everyone I know wants to help you attain that goal  
Thutmose: well, Thutmose is a grumpy bastard, but I am great  
Horemheb: that's good.....don't believe in Evil.....lol  
Thutmose: do you understand where I am coming from?  
Horemheb: ummm..... let me think..... do I win a prize if I get the right answer  
Horemheb: lol

Horemheb: yes of course  
Thutmose: sure  
Thutmose: a lovely prize  
Thutmose: a very fast chariot  
Horemheb: lol  
Thutmose: I can do you a good deal on a lovely gold embossed obelisk I just made..  
Thutmose: pharoah special  
Thutmose: triple the price everyone else pays ;)  
Horemheb: or you could make it an offering to your god.....  
Horemheb: I will receive your offering later today priest  
Horemheb: don't be late..... the god king doesn't like to be kept waiting

Horemheb was clearly aware of the tension between absolute historical accuracy and providing an engaging environment. On the one hand he wanted his community to be taken seriously by the wider role play community in Second Life. But on the other he also wanted to maintain a high enough number of members to keep the community sustainable. To this end he tried a whole series of things apart from Vikings. At Berenike's suggestion Nubians were added, although they didn't form a durable group. The Medjay (a mercenary police force) were added and became a strong contingent in the community. Libya had a space for a while. It attracted some Greeks and Romans who would interact with Egypt, and it became Cleopatra's refuge when she fell out with the priesthood.

An interesting aspect of this conversation is the way we slip in and out of character. As it's a private chat we don't need to be in character, but our avatars are standing in the city of Alexandria which creates a cognitive tension, and probably contributes to this slippage. I start the conversation as my avatar walks up to Horemheb's and so I greet him in Egyptian, but I do it in a private chat because my intention is to talk to him about an OOC matter. We then have an OOC conversation about the tensions caused by his allowing Vikings and not having told anyone. At one point in the conversation I talk about my character in an illesitic manner, saying "Well, Thutmose is a grumpy bastard, but I am great". The meaning I am trying to convey is that I keep any tension for role play, but my meatspace self is supporting Horemheb. It's a blithe expression meant to demonstrate that I feel it is important to separate in and out of character interactions. Near the end of the conversation Horemheb slips, he begins by speaking as his character and then, on the very next next line, speaks of that character in the third person. Unless the majestic plural applies, it's difficult to think of another occasion on which one might speak about one's different selves in this way. One becomes one's characters, but not for all the time, and the line between the character and one's self often slips, depending on where one is, what one is talking about, and whom to.

Horemheb was amazingly fond of sex, and of telling other men about it. He had a series of rooms, that he would hide by placing them in parts of the sim that weren't looked at often, for example underground, that obviously (because of their fitments i.e. beds with sexual poseballs in them) had the sole purpose of being sexual activity venues. He had the most comprehensive collection of sexual poseballs of anyone I knew in the world. Because of the absolute lack of privacy inherent in the nature of the world it always amazed me that people would have their avatars have sex in a sim where others could enter. But they did. Horemheb would usually do it at times he thought no one else would be in the sim. Because of my location however I would sometimes log in when everyone else was asleep and I would catch him in flagrante delicto. On these occasions he would blusteringly brag about this particular conquest. Occasionally the sim would be inaccessible in the middle of the American night and I would be unable to log in. Once I was able to relog (log in again after being logged out) he would be there alone but in his sex room. This led me to suspect that he would restrict admission to the sim when he really didn't want others to see what he was up to, or who he was up to it with, and leave it accessible when he was happy to be caught.

Horemheb loved to stir the pot and sit back and see what happened. There were a couple of players who were serial creators of grief. One in particular, a Gorean, would try to inject malice into every situation she participated in. Her particular specialty was OOC grief for role play actions. This resulted in Horemheb banning her a number of times, but he would always let her back in.

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Horemheb: Meresankh is whacked
Thutmose: whacked?
Horemheb: yes as in nuts
Thutmose: this is the ex general?
Horemheb: yes
Thutmose: ah
Thutmose: yes I saw she was back
Thutmose: she certainly seems quite unbalanced
Horemheb: naaaa.....ya think
Thutmose: I haven't had a lot of contact with her
Thutmose: but what I have had has been weird
Horemheb: She's like a cancer of doom and gloom and conspiracy
Thutmose: well you can fix that
Thutmose: god remember :)
Horemheb: Shes in Britannia..... there's a warrant out for
her.....lol
Horemheb: that will be fun
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Some players however were permanently banned. Several times I saw Meresankh's malicious actions result in a series of people getting permanently banned, while she would be banned for a short time and then be allowed to return. This created an impression that there was one rule for some but not

for others. It was the general opinion that the Goreans could do as they wished but others had to tread more carefully. I never saw a Gorean get permanently banned.

Thutmose: I have had complaints from the Min soldiers that soldiers in the other army are giving them shit OOC about the army  
Thutmose: and generally putting shit on the priesthood  
Horemheb: good.....make them tough..... perfect  
Horemheb: Intef.....I talked to him last night..... he needs to mature a little.....this is RP..... let them talk shit.....that's good for RP.  
Horemheb: That was/is Meresankh's issue  
Horemheb: cant separate RP from OOC  
Thutmose: yes, and I see she is back again..  
Horemheb: lol.....and we are using that for RP  
Thutmose: ok but we need to stress the RP v OOC thing  
Horemheb: the Magistrate has issued the arrest warrants  
Thutmose: there is a lot of crossover  
Thutmose: I try to enforce in character in local chat as much as I can  
Horemheb: that's up to people like you and me..... I do not tolerate it, nor do I engage in the conversations.....when Intef whined to me on Sun.....I slapped him upside the head.....

Horemheb instituted a policy of no permanent death. The combatants would slice and dice each other daily and would die when their meter had accrued enough blows. But then they would get up again and go at it. This obviously affected the role play.

Thutmose: what happens when a character gets killed?  
Horemheb: up to the character  
Horemheb: you can RP the death  
Thutmose: and does the same character come back or do they have to choose another one?  
Horemheb: or just end the RP and start new  
Horemheb: same  
Horemheb: like it never happened  
Thutmose: ok that's weird  
Horemheb: it's SL  
Horemheb: you talk it out OOC  
Horemheb: do it all the time  
Thutmose: what's the point of killing people then if they don't stay dead?  
Horemheb: dude.....that's SL..... people cant afford to create new avis and buy all new items etc.....nor do they want to be another avi.....they would leave  
Thutmose: that's not what I meant, they don't have to get a new avi just make that avi another character  
Thutmose: it just seems to make it hard to develop a story line  
Thutmose: if people die and then they are better

Here Horemheb is referring to how items are tied to avatars by the permissions system. Once a particular avatar purchases clothes, weapons etc. those items can't be transferred to another avatar, even if it belongs to the same user. Because of this investment in items people are loathe to have their character die. While the permissions system might be seen by content creators as a way to protect their items it is limiting the options of users. There is a consistent discourse among users regarding how much they hate the permission system and how it limits them. People want to support content creators but they don't want to be restricted in their usage of items. This is driven by the concept of ownership. People purchase items for meatspace money and they expect the features of meatspace ownership will apply because of this. The permissions system however prevents this from being the case.

## How I Came To Ancient Egypt

My own interest in Paganism led me to look for sims themed along these lines. It wasn't long at all after I first ventured into Second Life that I met Seti. Seti is a publisher with an abiding interest in all things relating to ancient Egypt, having written several books on this topic<sup>345</sup>. The first religious building I encountered in Second Life was a Thelemic cathedral. Seti gave me the tour, and also the low down on an Egyptian role play community in which he was participating. This was Anachronistic Lands - Ptolemaic Egypt. I decided to check it out.

Seti teleported me to this Egypt and showed me around. There was a lot of sand. There was a rather diminutive Nile. There were huge statues of kings. This kind of cultural stereotyping is commonplace in Second Life. Firstly it is driven by the reality tunnels of the residents creating the world: secondly by the technical constraints of the environment. In the first case, the reality tunnel, because one can't build something unless one can first imagine it. Only then can one begin to discover technical constraints. Apparently a vision of Egypt as depicted in the work of Disney permeates most of the reality tunnels I encountered. The physical environment is dominated by omnipresent sand, no fertile black soil here, no lush gardens, just sand and giant white stone statues.

In the second case, when one only has available a 256 x 256 metre piece of land, one has to make design decisions, the results of which are not always entirely able to represent physical reality at a 1:1 scale. When I built the Temple of Amun at Karnak in 2012 it was, even then, the only 1:1 build of an accurate Egyptian temple, and it took up an entire sim. The Ptolemaic Egypt community was expansive by Second Life standards with its six sims, while the second community I studied, Nubian Egypt, had only two sims. So one has to make decisions about what to represent. Is your Egyptian sim going to have

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<sup>345</sup> The anonymity requirements of the ethics committee prevent me from identifying to you the works he has published.

a lot of boating? Yes? Then make the majority of your sim be water, with just a bit of wharf. No? Then have a small sliver of water to represent the mighty Nile and the rest mostly land.

On first entering Ptolemaic Egypt I promptly got lost in the never ending sand dunes. This was before I found out about the mini map. This is a small map that overlays, once one turns it on, a portion of the main screen of the Second Life client. This map moves as one's avatar moves around and shows other avatars, one's own prims and the general lay of the land. Initially the mini map is a bit confusing as, unlike most maps, North is not always up. Rather the mini map changes its orientation depending on which direction one's avatar is facing. But once I had the mini map sorted life was much easier.

Soon I encountered other avatars dressed as ancient Egyptians. I immediately realised that I was inappropriately attired. Seti showed me where I could acquire freebie Egyptian clothing. I hadn't yet discovered the world's monetary system. Sims sometimes provide freebie clothing to entice visitors to get into the spirit and feel like they fit in, as well as to maintain the illusion for the role players. Some sims had rules that prevented even newcomers from entering unless appropriately attired. My next realization was that freebie clothing is invariably ugly as sin. I came to this realization after I discovered the ever popular Second Life sport of noob baiting. Seven foot tall Caucasians dressed in purple Roman armour would revile newcomers dressed in modern clothing for being inauthentically dressed for 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty Egypt. One quickly feels one's avatar as a self extension<sup>346</sup>. I felt uncomfortable walking around in my dodgy noob avatar and freebie clothing. My first encounter with the Second Life economy was about to begin. Seti gave me a lead on where to source an outfit that he felt was much better than the freebie outfit but, he said, fabulously expensive. It was L\$100 apparently. I didn't have L\$100. I didn't know how to get Linden dollars at all.

Second Life is free to use. This means you can get an account, and an associated avatar, download the software client and enter the world for free, and wear freebie clothing. There are a number of places one can obtain clothes, avatar accoutrements etc. for free in Second Life. These are usually generic Western items of clothing, mostly of very ordinary quality. Better things could be bought, for Linden dollars. Linden dollars could be bought from Linden Lab and paid for by credit card. There were ways to get Linden Dollars without buying them, such as camping - a practice whereby sim owners paid avatars to sit around in their sim to affect the Linden Lab popularity ratings. The idea of camping was boring and ethically questionable so I decided to sign up for a Premium account, a paid account costing between USD 6.00 and 9.95 per month, depending on billing cycle. Premium membership also provided access to Linden Lab's support offerings, though my experience demonstrates that this offers a very low level of service, with

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346 Lim, S., Reeves, B., (2010), "Computer agents versus avatars: Responses to interactive game characters controlled by a computer or other player", *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 1-2, pp 57-68.



many users expressing dissatisfaction at both the time taken (sometimes six months!) to receive a reply and the quality of information provided. For these reasons premium membership is in serious decline. So much so that Linden Lab stopped publishing information on the growth of Premium memberships once the numbers started to go negative<sup>347</sup>.

At the time Linden Lab was advertising "Sign up for a Premium account and get L\$1,000!". Also, they assured me, with a Premium Account I would "get free land" and I would get a weekly stipend of L\$300 (L\$1,300 per month). Further, if I was referred by an existing resident they would get L\$1,000 as well. The cost was USD 72 per year, USD 6 a month (L\$1,500). So, after deducting the amount I would receive for my stipend from my monthly payment, my membership would effectively only cost me L\$200 or USD 0.80 per month. After I received my L\$1,000 it would be effectively free for five months. Also I would be able to buy more Linden Dollars at any time and, more importantly, sell those Linden Dollars back for US Dollars. This meant that I could potentially generate an income if I could sell things I had made inworld. So I signed up.

I soon found that "Sign up for a Premium account and get L\$1,000!" didn't mean - come into Second Life, check it out, decide one liked it, get a Premium Account, get L\$1,000. It actually meant - if prior to the very first time one ever entered Second Life one signed up for a Premium Account, one would get L\$1,000, after the account had been active for 45 days. This was either deceptive advertising or poor policy, and now Linden Lab's policy has changed to pay the bonus to premium accounts that are upgrades of free accounts<sup>348</sup>. It was also very annoying, the reason being that during the process of creating an account one invariably had to have many attempts at selecting an avatar name before one was found that wasn't already taken. Once one had been found, one was loathe to lose it, which would have been the case if one decided to start again to qualify for the signing bonus. Some did qualify for the L\$1,000, but they were only those who had not yet created an account and given their meatspace name to Linden Lab. Once one had done that it was impossible to ever get the signing bonus. This was not specified before one signed up for a free account. It was only after upgrading to a premium account and on inquiring why one's L\$1,000 had not arrived that one was informed of this loophole.

It transpired that "get free land" had a loophole too. In the olden days of pioneering in Second Life residents did indeed get free land. A 512m<sup>2</sup> plot was allocated to each resident. In time rent (known as tier) was charged on this land. When paid Premium Accounts were introduced free account holders could no longer own land. Premium account holders were at first able to

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347 Nino, T., (NDP), *Monthly Premium Account Growth Feb 2005 to Nov 2008*, <http://taterunino.net/statcharts/premiumgrowth400.png>. Accessed 01/02/2011.

348 Second Life Knowledge Base, (2011), *Premium membership*, [http://community.secondlife.com/t5/tkb/articleprintpage/tkb-id/English\\_KB@tkb/article-id/203](http://community.secondlife.com/t5/tkb/articleprintpage/tkb-id/English_KB@tkb/article-id/203). Accessed 02/04/2014.

obtain 512m<sup>2</sup> blocks known as First Land<sup>349</sup> for L\$1 per 1m<sup>2</sup>. First Land had no tier due on it but it was discontinued in February 20, 2007<sup>350</sup>. From then on to be eligible to buy land one had to have a Premium Account. One then had to buy land at market rates and the first 512m<sup>2</sup> was tier free. So at the time I signed up for a Premium Account in 2008 "get free land" actually meant "pay for permission to be allowed to buy land and have the first 512m<sup>2</sup> be tier free". This change of policy was poorly explained on the Second Life website which led to much dissatisfaction among users who remained under the impression that they would get free land if they upgraded their account from a free account to a premium account. Linden Lab subsequently changed this policy and began offering Linden Homes (small parcels of land, already landscaped and with simple houses on them) to users with premium accounts<sup>351</sup>. These are subject to so many limitations that, as Jack Linden explains;

...the house cannot be removed and the parcels cannot be sold, joined, terraformed or divided. Events and classifieds cannot be created for these parcels; only Premium Members can own them, and only one per account.<sup>352</sup>

These houses were not well received and extend across the Second Life landscape as a vast, overcrowded but underutilised suburban blight.

All these loopholes added up to an extremely underwhelming experience. With an unfulfilled promise of L\$1,000, (USD 4.00) and some deceptive advertising Linden Lab had dampened my enthusiasm for them. Now, slightly less enamored of Second Life, I was financially equipped to find the robes Seti had suggested. I remembered his comment that the robes were fabulously expensive. But now I knew that L\$100 was less than 50 US cents. Seeing someone had taken the time and effort to make these robes, it seemed odd that Seti had characterized L\$100 as expensive. It turns out that Seti was representative of a particular set of Second Life residents who would do everything they could to not spend any money inworld. They oft expressed that it seemed strange to part with real money for virtual goods. Some remained like this for years while others eventually joined the ranks of Second Life shoppers. The robes Seti recommended didn't look particularly Egyptian to me, but they were certainly better than what I was presently wearing. Having outlaid the fabulous sum of L\$100 I was fitted out in my plain, three quarter length, white robe.

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349 Second Life Wiki, *First Land*, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/First\\_Land](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/First_Land), Accessed 02/04/2014.

350 Linden, J., (2007), *First Land program to end*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Features/First-Land-program-to-end/ba-p/558239>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

351 Second Life Knowledge Base, *Linden Homes*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/English-Knowledge-Base/Linden-Homes/ta-p/700103>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

352 Linden, J., (2009), *Home is where you hang your avatar's hat*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Land-and-Sea-General/Home-is-where-you-hang-your-avatar-s-hat/ba-p/651083>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

I visited Ptolemaic Egypt a few times, usually finding no one else there. Then one day I was up late and found many people in the sims. I went into a temple and that's where I met Amon. Amon told me it was the temple of Osiris and that I could become a priest if I wanted to. He told me that in this community one selected a role from one of a number of groups. One could be in the army, a priest or a noble. It really depended on one's interests. I said of those groups I was interested in being a priest and asked what the priests did. He said they did rituals and were the educators of the community. I said that I would join the priesthood. Amon said he would organise an initiation ritual for me and that he would show me around. Within five minutes Amon had me visiting his house and was asking me "So Thutmose, do you like cock?" Not quite knowing how to respond, I replied that I didn't have one. Avatars in Second Life don't come with genitals. It's one of the ironies of Second Life that sex related activities are some of the most popular things to do, but the default avatars are genital free. On the one hand Linden Lab is profiting from the presence of sex related activities, they even created an entire adult rated continent, but they can't bring themselves to give avatars genitals. But just like everything else an avatar might need in Second Life, genitals can be bought. Amon gave me some landmarks for places I could get genitals for my avatar and assured me they would be a worthwhile investment.

Having sidestepped the cock conversation I asked Amon why it was that I had hardly seen any people in the sims. The reason, he told me, is that most of the population of the sims was American or European. It seems that the times of day I was most likely to be in the world were the quietest, with most people being there in US afternoons and evenings. He assured me that many more people would be encountered if I was on at the right times. The busiest times for the sims turned out to be 7pm to 12am Second Life time<sup>353</sup>, with the weekends being the busiest times and Tuesday and Wednesday being quiet.

Amon gave me a copy of the sim rules and told me to apply to join the group for the sims. Anyone, actually any two avatars as you need a minimum of two members, can start a group. A group is a way of communicating with a number of people. Once one has a group one can send out notices to all the members of the group. This is the main way people are advised of when events will occur. Ptolemaic Egypt had a whole set of groups. There was the main group for the community, which everyone belonged to and separate groups for the priests, the warriors and the nobles. Amon advised me I had to fill in an application form to join the group. He gave me a notecard, which I include below, and asked me to fill it in and return it. All notecards included herein have not been edited, except to anonymise residents.

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353 Second Life time is US west coast time.

## Notecard - Anachronistic Lands Ptolemaic Egypt Application

Thank you for being interested in applying for a role in Anachronistic Lands.

This notecard should be sent to "Seshemetka" . In order to do so, click on "Search" button on the bottom bar of the screen, then go to "People" tab, type in "Seshemetka" and click on Search, then drop the notecard from your inventory on top the profile opened.

IMPORTANT: Role play is the same as being an actor in a movie. Being on the Anachronistic Lands sims is like being on a movie set with the cameras rolling. We are in Role Play FULL TIME. We do not come out of our characters in Anachronistic Lands. Once you are here in character, you are to stay in character the entire time. We pay a lot of real US dollars for these sims and provide them, free of charge, for you to use. We expect you, in return, to contribute positively to our role play. If you are not prepared to contribute to the role play, please don't waste our time and yours submitting the application.

Anachronistic Lands Role Play Application

Name:

SL date of birth:

Where do you live in RL?:

What role do you wish?:

Please describe how you see this role and what your expectations are in RP:

Any other information that you think is helpful (other friends you have, ideas you have etc.):

## Ptolemaic Egypt Rules

The admins referred to in this notecard are sim members who have such duties as picking up prim litter and keeping the server the sim runs on running or restarting it if required. Becoming an admin requires that certain of the permissions that control access to the sim control system and groups be delegated to the admin by the sim owner. The role play council was an alleged body of experienced role players who would direct and adjudicate disputes about role play events. I never saw any evidence that they actually existed.

## Notecard - Sim Rules

THESE ARE THE RULES - BY BREAKING THESE RULES, YOU MAY BE EJECTED FROM THE GROUP AND SIM. IGNORANCE OF THE RULES IS NO EXCUSE.

### \*SIM RULES\*

This is a privately owned Sim. We make the rules. Follow them, or do not come to the Sim. We follow the Second Life TOS rules. OVER 18, HUMAN AVI'S ONLY. NO EXCEPTIONS.

NO OOC CHAT.....NONE. We take a very hard line on those who violate this fundamental rule. If you wish to argue take it off of the Sim or into IM. If you're warned about OOC chat and continue, you will be booted from the SIM. If your OOC chat behaviors continue, you will be banned. If you are confused at all about what OOC versus ROLE PLAY IC is, please read the notecards.

NO FLYING, NO GUNS, BOMBS, LIGHT SABRES, GRENADES, ROCKETS, CAGES, ORBITING, INVISIBILITY, PUSH DEVICES, INVISIBLE PRIMS, SHIELDS or non approved weapons. That means don't wear SL based weapon huds, anti griefer huds or listening devices. WARNING. Violate this and you will be banned.

Please let your captors know the limitations of your role-play, this should be done via IM, referring them to an entry in your profile is good. You are not required to allow things to happen to your avatar that you don't want to happen. It is YOUR responsibility to notify your captors of your limits. We do not want to hear complaints that you were forced to accept something against your limits.

NO scaling the walls of any City, Temple or Statue. You must use an appropriate method and it must be realistically roleplayed, that means roleplayed from the point where you set off from, since rezzing them out of thin air is not acceptable. Remember these are the walls of an ancient cities, not a garden fence. Please see HOW TO ROLE PLAY notecards for examples.

Any and all open chat may be recorded, copied, or Note Carded, and may be transmitted to anyone to facilitate good Role Play, to aid in the judgment of Role Play validity, or for the amusement of those involved, their teammates and/or friends.

Lindens can be used in Role Play for Role Play goods and services. However, lindens are not used for ransoms, bribery, theft etc. If you are not sure, ask a Sim Admin.

There are no safe zones, however, we don't condone attacking someone/anyone unless you have a valid Role Play reason.

Modern slang such as "lol" "brb" "kk" "wtf" "cya" "r u done?" is not appropriate in role play.

Gestures are NOT allowed in the sim.

### COMBAT RULES

\*\*\*\*\*Please Read before Combat in Anachronistic Lands\*\*\*\*\*

Have Fun, but please be respectful of others. We all want to win and we all want to be the best. Yet, losing a fight in role play combat does not mean you lost. There are many opportunities for those who use their minds as well as their fingers to win the final fight. DO NOT attempt to stop combat by calling 'INVALID' the decision is not yours to make. If you feel that the combat you were in is unfair, then submit a complaint to an ADMIN after the combat situation is over.

When your red cage is rezzed you are down. That means you are incapacitated (you have been stunned, knocked unconscious, wounded etc). You cannot YELL, scream insults to others, or otherwise act like you have full health. Your opponents have 5 mins to RP your capture or death. If they do not RP tie and bind you up and your meter brings you back to health, you can run away. YOU CANNOT RESET YOUR METER.

We do not kill opponents without solid RP reason. Again, we do not kill others in combat without having a valid role play reason. You must have 3 full lines of text for your kill. While you are dead you have 1 hour to find something else to do. Ghosts do not speak at all in open chat, rarely in IM and never interfere with role-play. Non meter role play death may last longer than one hour as agreed to by the parties involved in the RP. If you don't understand this rule, please speak to an Admin.

Only approved Weapons that would be used during our time in history are legal in Anachronistic Lands.

Don't RP anything that is not humanly possible. Doing so in combat will not be tolerated. And will be reported to the RP council.

Once combat has begun, YOU CANNOT tp in others into combat. If your group is outnumbered, then it is outnumbered, that is the RP, deal with it.

You cannot TP out of combat once it has begun. NO EXCUSE. If you crash, well, you crash, happens to all of us. You cannot TP back into combat. If you do TP out, you must wait at least 15 minutes prior to coming back into game. You cannot then magically TP back into the combat area. You are allowed to TP back into that SIM. Again, if you tp out in combat, you must wait 15 min

The most important thing in RP combat is that we're all here to have fun, please follow the rules and it will be a better experience for all.

There are a number of interesting things to notice about the community rules. One of the very first things the sim rules state is "this is a privately owned sim". This is a problematic statement and reveals the cause of many issues which were to arise in Second Life. As previously noted Linden Lab's use of the word 'buy' is quite misleading. Despite it being clearly spelled out to the contrary in the Terms of Service, people act as if they have in fact purchased their land. Because of this perceived ownership they have a sense of proprietorship, a sense that they may make whatever rules they choose for that land, and they do, and these rules often contravene the Second Life Terms of Service. In choosing to ignore the rules imposed upon them by Linden Lab, many of which are imposed in turn on Linden Lab by the rules of

the nation state, residents are duplicating meatspace legal assumptions. The notecard begins with "IGNORANCE OF THE RULES IS NO EXCUSE". This is a replication of the principle of a monopoly of violence that exists in the meatspace world. It is the power of this monopoly that allows nation states to impose laws on their citizens and declare that ignorance is no excuse for violations. Sim owners likewise exercise a monopoly of violence in their ability to unilaterally ban residents, and this allows them, like nation states, to make these kinds of rules, against which residents, like citizens of nation states, have no effective recourse. In turn game and virtual world companies also utilize this same principle, which they enforce by means of their terms of service, which are in turn enforced by meatspace laws.

The events surrounding Peter Ludlow's expulsion from The Sims Online is one such example. Mr Ludlow, a professor of philosophy and linguistics at the University of Michigan, had a penchant for writing stories about the less salubrious side of The Sims Online; currency scams, prostitution and so on. Electronic Arts (EA), the publishers of The Sims Online, emailed him to ask him to stop<sup>354</sup>, but when he refused EA banned him for violating their terms of service<sup>355</sup>. Ludlow claimed he was being censored by EA<sup>356</sup> but he remained banned. So he moved to Second Life.

But this is not an aberration caused by some imagined failure of the virtual to facilitate the enforcement of meatspace laws. Linden Lab likewise exceeded its authority to impose rules on residents when it banned one Marc Bragg for allegedly subverting the land purchasing system<sup>357</sup>. Mr. Bragg was a lawyer, so he sued Linden Lab and the result was the first serious case in the United States in relation to virtual property. Linden Lab's reason for banning Bragg was a clause in its Terms of Service that stated "Linden Lab has the right at any time for any reason or no reason to suspend or terminate your Account, terminate this Agreement, and/or refuse any and all current or future use of the Service without notice or liability to you"<sup>358</sup>. In an interesting turn of events the court was to rule that Linden Lab's Terms of Service were unconscionable and could not be enforced<sup>359</sup>. These examples demonstrate not only the tensions that exist between the interests of the people using virtual worlds and the companies selling them access to these worlds, but also those between citizens of nation states and their lawmakers.

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354 Manjoo, F., (2003), *Raking muck in "The Sims Online"*, [http://www.salon.com/2003/12/12/sims\\_online\\_newspaper/](http://www.salon.com/2003/12/12/sims_online_newspaper/), Accessed 09/02/2014.

355 Goldman, E., (2005), *Speech Showdowns at the Virtual Corral*, <http://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/facpubs/73/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

356 Harmon, A., (2004), *A Real-Life Debate On Free Expression In a Cyberspace City*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/15/business/technology-a-real-life-debate-on-free-expression-in-a-cyberspace-city.html>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

357 Bragg, M. S., (2006), *Virtual Land Dispute Spills Over Into Real World*, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/virtual-land-dispute-spills-over-into-real-world-56211482.html>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

358 Lastowka, G., (2010), *Virtual Justice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 18.

359 Lastowka, G., (2010), *Virtual Justice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 19.



Despite the absolute statement in the Ptolemaic Egypt sim rules that they follow the Second Life Terms of Service, these sim rules directly contravene the Terms of Service. The Second Life Terms of Service specify that one must agree to abide by the Community Standards. This document sets out six behaviors that are prohibited in the world and then goes on to give specific examples of how these might be breached in the world. The six items listed in the Community Standards are: Intolerance, Harassment, Assault, Disclosure, Indecency and Disturbing the Peace<sup>360</sup>. The need to abide by these six items is contradicted by the sim rules for capture which state that;

There are no safe zones, however, we don't condone attacking someone/anyone unless you have a valid Role Play reason.

Please let your captors know the limitations of your role-play, this should be done via IM, referring them to an entry in your profile is good. You are not required to allow things to happen to your avatar that you don't want to happen. It is YOUR responsibility to notify your captors of your limits. We do not want to hear complaints that you were forced to accept something against your limits.

Both these statements contradict the Terms of Service by placing the onus on a resident to declare they don't want to participate in activities already prohibited in the Terms of Service. This was a constant source of conflict, especially with new members, as they would invariably be attacked by the hardcore combat role players as soon as they entered the sims.

As previously discussed people presume they are anonymous in Second Life. They also presume that their private conversations are in fact private. As the Second Life software client provides the ability to log all conversations, whether between individuals or groups, an interesting anarchic tension is here revealed between the Community Standards and the perception of ownership that residents have once they have "bought land". The Community Standards state very clearly that;

Disclosure: Residents are entitled to a reasonable level of privacy with regard to their Second Life experience. Sharing personal information about a fellow Resident --including gender, religion, age, marital status, race, sexual preference, and real-world location beyond what is provided by the Resident in the First Life page of their Resident profile is a violation of that Resident's privacy. Remotely monitoring conversations, posting conversation logs, or sharing conversation logs without consent are all prohibited in Second Life and on the Second Life Forums.

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360 Linden Lab, *Second Life Community Standards*, <http://secondlife.com/corporate/cs.php>. Accessed 14/06/2009.

However the rules of Ptolemaic Egypt state that;

Any and all open chat may be recorded, copied, or Note Carded, and may be transmitted to anyone to facilitate good Role Play, to aid in the judgment of Role Play validity, or for the amusement of those involved, their teammates and/or friends.

This is a blatant contravention of the Community Standards as this rule means that anything anyone says in the local chat channel may be recorded and copied and disseminated freely. One might argue that as the Community Standards say "without consent" if one were to agree to the sim rules one has de facto given one's consent for this to occur. However the sentence that contains "without consent" in the Community Standards refers to the posting or sharing of logs, whereas the sim rules would allow the sharing of anything in local chat even if it included information about "gender, religion, age, marital status, race, sexual preference, and real-world location beyond what is provided by the Resident in the First Life page of their Resident profile"<sup>361</sup>, which action is specifically prohibited by the Community Standards.

In practice the situation moved well beyond these subtle distinctions. In all the communities in which I participated it was the ubiquitous practice to notecard everything, including private conversations, and share them freely. In fact, people would make remarks such as "here is a Terms of Service violation" when passing notecards to others. Such remarks reveal the futility of imposing unenforceable rules.

Because residents of a community are invariably not all present at the same time, it is normal practice in Second Life to log everything and then to share it with absent members of the community. Whenever any event, of any level of importance, occurs, one would be inundated with a series of notecards that contained not just the contents of the local chat but also the contents of any private chats that any parties might have had about that event. These would also often be posted to any website that the community might run to facilitate communication between its members. Everyone was aware that this was prohibited by the Community Standards, but it was carried on regardless.

The reason people did this is that they could. There was no way for Linden Lab to stop them. This is a feature of online life which lies at the heart of the copyright wars. There is no practical way for copyright holders, or the lawmakers they lobby so heavily<sup>362</sup>, to stop people copying, or from accessing content from a specific location. If a law is passed in a particular nation state to block content a user can simply change to a different domain name server

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361 Linden Lab, *Second Life Community Standards*, <http://secondlife.com/corporate/cs.php>. Accessed 14/06/2009.

362 Lessig, L., (2004), *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*, p. 9, [http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free\\_culture.lawrence\\_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf](http://www.jus.uio.no/sisu/free_culture.lawrence_lessig/portrait.letter.pdf). Accessed 18/12/2013.

in another nation state. This will allow the user to access the blocked content by bypassing the local restrictions. Alternatively the user may employ a virtual private network, which will make their traffic appear to come from somewhere else and thus is an effective method to circumvent geoblocking (an attempt to restrict data to users in a particular physical location). Because these methods are so easy to effect, and so hard to prevent anarchy still prevails in online life, as Michael<sup>363</sup> argues so compellingly.

Many of the rules of this community were designed to maintain the illusion that one is immersed in an ancient Egyptian world. For example, "NO OOC CHAT.....NONE". This rule aims to ensure that one only speaks in the local chat channel in the voice of one's character. This rule was infrequently adhered to and no one was ever banned for breaking it. It was the actual practice in Ptolemaic Egypt that if one wished to address an OOC remark one would place it in parentheses. In the below example a number of priests are gathered in the temple to undertake a ritual. Some text is speech of the characters, some is emoting<sup>364</sup> and the remarks in parentheses are OOC remarks. There are various reasons these remarks are inserted; in order to enable the completion of the ritual by giving directions, to deal with OOC matters that come up, and to comment on those OOC matters. For example when Thutmose says "repeat please" it is to indicate that the priest doing the ritual should repeat what has just been said. When "oh oh" is said it is because some visitors to the sim entered the temple where the ritual was happening and had to be directed elsewhere. Likewise "sorry dealing with the visitors" and "thank you".

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363 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

364 Emoting is to describe in text actions that one's avatar is doing but which cannot be actually carried out by the avatar because of technical limitations. This will be discussed further later.

## Chat Excerpt - OOC usage

Thutmose: let us all cleans ourselves before we enter the sacred parts of the temple  
Amon washes his feet in the holy waters  
Cleopatra: Washing her feet  
Amon slashes his face and neck  
Thutmose: may the waters of the temple cleanse up and make us fit to enter the gaze of our gods  
Amon: \*splashes\*  
Thutmose: (repeat please)  
Berenike splashes water over herself.  
Thutmose: ((oh oh))  
Cleopatra: (sigh)  
Berenike: May the waters of the temple cleanse and make us fit to enter the gaze of our gods.  
Thutmose: ((sorry dealing with the visitors))  
Cleopatra: ((thank you))  
Thutmose: aspirant please wait here, Menka you too  
Thutmose: high priests please come with me

Because of the OOC rule being constantly flouted, from time to time those running the sim would issue notices to try to stop the practice, even though they themselves also frequently failed to comply with it, the practicalities of the interface making it impossible to abide by it 100% of the time as the chat channels which were supposed to be used for this purpose were frequently non functional.

## Notecard - OOC Chat Guidelines

27/06/08

General guidelines regarding Role Play and OOC conversations in open chat.

All of Egypt, and each and every one of the sims that are part of the Anachronistic Lands group, follow the same standards and rules. We are all 100% full time ROLE PLAY sims. What that means is simple... All of you are IN CHARACTER (IC) the entire time you are here. As a member, your participation is based upon your commitment to work within, and to support, these standards and rules. In choosing to be a member of our group of sims, you choose to obey and live within our rules.

Some members from time to time will become lazy, or disinterested in ROLE PLAY, and will break the commitment to 100% full time ROLE PLAY. When that happens, they then speak OOC in open chat. Speaking OOC in open chat, is not within the purpose of our sim group. Speaking OOC in open chat, is disruptive to ROLE PLAY and also, disrespectful to all of the other members here who are fully committed to full time ROLE PLAY.

There is a need for some here to turn their meters to OOC, in order for

them to do work for the sim. In that regard, they are not in ROLE PLAY, and not are not participating in ROLE PLAY.

In addition, it is completely unacceptable to our group, and to each and every member, to have anyone in OOC chat use language, or intentions, that are considered to be disrespectful of others here. Specifically, calling someone else a "fuck" or "shithead" or "whore" or "asshole", or any such language that is generally offensive has NO PLACE HERE. Nor are any comments that are derogatory to others here, in anyway, acceptable behavior.

We are all here to ROLE PLAY and have FUN. None of us, NONE, are here to be subjected to any such displays of behavior, or language.

Again... We are 100% FULL TIME ROLE PLAY.

Thank you all for your continued support

Like most notices in the community, this one is contradictory. It begins by declaring all participants of the sims to be in role play 100% of the time and then goes on to say that sometimes there are necessary exceptions for sim admins, before again declaring 100% role play. This exemplifies the constant disparity between stated rules and goals and realised ones.

## Meta Chatting

Another feature of conversation in the world is that there are multiple dimensions to conversations: multiple layers of conversing. One is not only having the conversation, one is also, at the same time, commenting on it, embellishing it and inserting another conversation into it. All conversations in the world are multi dimensional, often to the extreme. This is then further compounded by adding multiple other layers of textual interaction until one is engaged in a series of conversations that are each often meta conversations of the others.

The first type of text conversation that one usually has in the world is to talk to another avatar in local chat. Any conversation in local chat is geographically defined, that is, it can be 'heard' by any avatar located within twenty metres of the speaker<sup>365</sup>. This is the channel where the role play usually happens, the one where, ostensibly, no OOC chat should occur. It is also the channel where any system notices, messages from the scripting subsystem or messages to advise that other avatars have logged on or off appear. This channel is often a confusing morass of information. The following block of text has not been edited, except to anonymise users, and clearly shows the raw experience of local chat. When one first enters the world there is no explanation as to what the various obscure types of entry in local chat

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365 Second Life Wiki, *Communication*, <http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Communication>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

refer to or mean. This is information that must be acquired by osmosis as one goes along. This adds confusion and uncertainty to the process of becoming a resident. In order to share this experience with you I shall provide an explanation of terms after this excerpt so that you encounter it as I first did, in all its inscrutability.

## Chat Excerpt - Raw Local Chat

```
Djoser: me and brother Pepi r going to go to the marketplace
Thutmose: well you must think upon it for your initiation is today and
you must choose then
Pepi: I will study on it
Khenut: Well I shall go back to my duties and leave you all to your
work. Senebty Priests
Thutmose: senetby Khenut
Djoser: senebty
Takelot: Senetby
Pepi: senetby
Thutmose: I have work to do here
Thutmose: I must prepare for the ceremony
Pepi: we are going to the marketplace
Removal of the object 'Omega Drop and Go Teleport' from the simulator is
disallowed by the permissions system.
Nimaathap is Offline
Teleport completed from http://slurl.com/secondlife/ROMA
%20Subura/15/48/24
You decline '::: B@R ::: Sweet Room' ( http://slurl.com/secondlife/Bare
%20Rose/145/80/34 ) from ::: BareRose ::: Raffle Item Orb.
FlipTitle-BAst: To set a title: title <color name> <title text>
FlipTitle-BAst: To remove title: title off
FlipTitle-BAst: <color name> can be: white, black, red, green, blue,
pink, cyan, purple, yellow, orange
SL Exchange Magic Box white gave you 'kalb'
(http://slurl.com/secondlife/Playa%20Bavaro/149/144/402 ).
You decline schedule for week of March 8, '09 from A group member named
Berenike.
A group member named Berenike gave you Summary of Roleplay in Thebes, 2-
8-09.
Berenike: This one.
Berenike: Yay, it isn't a wading pool.
Inenek-Inty is Offline
Berenike: Hmmm, I am...
Berenike: And this might explain that black dot.
Try moving closer. Can't sit on object because it is not in the same
region as you.
Inenek-Inty is Online
Thutmose: em hotep
IM: Nebty-nub: nan you come to the temple and help me with this scroll
case I am building?
Berenike: Em hotep.
Thutmose: mind the well
Nimaathap: ((Gimmie a sec, I'll change))
Thutmose: a man fell down it yesterday and i had a terrible time getting
him up again
Berenike: hehehehe, which man?
```

IM: Nebty-nub: okay I'll get a coffee and be back by then  
 Thutmose: Intef  
 Berenike: show off.  
 Berenike: Intef????  
 Xstreet SL Terminal v2.2.5 st: Contacting server. Please wait.  
 Xstreet SL Terminal v2.2.5 st: Deposit \$500 successful. Your account has been credited.  
 Thutmose: it keeps deleting the trees before I can place them  
 Nebty-nub: It is truly beautiful  
 Intef: The Nubians are waiting for a palace  
 Nebty-nub: Do they expect us to give them men for labor?  
 Nebty-nub gave you cow with moo sounds YS.  
 Nebty-nub gave you Cow Sound Module.  
 Second Life: Items coming in too fast, automatic preview disabled for 10 seconds.  
 Cow with moo sounds YS: Could not find sound 'Cow Sound #5'.  
 Copy failed because you lack permission to copy the object 'kalb'.  
 Copy failed because you lack permission to copy the object 'cow with moo sounds YS'.  
 Thutmose: I shall set you the task of find out out which god shall be the one who you speak to above all others  
 Thutmose: though all the gods must be worshiped  
 Thutmose: most find one god speaks to them particularly  
 Khenut: (brb)  
 Takelot: I have chosen Anubis  
 Djoser: em hotep all  
 Takelot: em hotep  
 Pepi: em hotep  
 Thutmose: a brave choice  
 Djoser: it is good to see you again brother Thutmose  
 Thutmose: em hotep  
 Djoser: em hotep  
 Thutmose: I see you too have been practicing the arts of fighting  
 Djoser: yes  
 Djoser: ((Amon said i am like a warrior  
 Thutmose: have you chosen a god to protect you?  
 Khenut: (back sorry about that)  
 Thutmose: or you aspirant have you chosen a god/  
 Thutmose: Pepi?  
 Pepi: not as yet Brother Thutmose

It is interesting to note that when one is in the world and communicating via local chat the experience is perceived as much less cluttered and confusing than it is to read a log of the same thing later. One somehow filters out that which is not immediately crucial. In order to preserve for you as much as possible the experience of being in the world I have not edited any notecards or chat excerpts except to anonymise participants. This means that they contain all the original typographic and spelling errors and remain formatted exactly as the residents typed them.

As well as messages from other users in local chat, which are identifiable by starting with a resident's name followed by a colon, there are private messages sent from one resident directly to another. These are identifiable by the presence of 'IM:', which stands for instant message, before the sender's



name. While messages of this kind usually appear in a separate tab in the communication window, there is a setting in the client which allows these messages to also be displayed in the main chat window. This enables one to see such messages without having to switch to the particular resident's tab when one is also chatting in local. If one wishes to reply to such a message one is however obliged to change to the resident's tab. Also present are system messages, for example on the twelfth line one can see "Removal of the object 'Omega Drop and Go Teleport' from the simulator is disallowed by the permissions system." This is a message from the system, generated in response to some action I was taking, advising that removal of the named object is not allowed. There are also messages advising when particular residents leave or enter the world. This is limited to residents who are on one's friends list. There is also a system messages that says "Try moving closer. Can't sit on object because it is not in the same region as you." This is indicating that the object I tried to sit on is on the other side of a sim boundary to my avatar. Sim boundaries are not normally apparent, there is a setting in the client to draw a line to show where they are, but, because one can move one's camera independently of one's avatar, one might move one's view and see an object and try to sit on it, not being aware that it is actually on the other side of the sim boundary. There are also messages from objects in the world, for example "Cow with moo sounds YS: Could not find sound 'Cow Sound #5'". This is telling me that a nearby cow object, with which I am not explicitly interacting, can't play its embedded sound due to not being able to find the sound file. Despite the no OOC in local rule there are several OOC messages in this sample, they are identifiable by the use of parentheses.

As complex as it is to extract meaning and follow the thread of role play in such an environment, this is only one layer of the experience. In addition to local chat one might have any number of other chat windows open. In addition to local chat one can chat in a private conversation (instant message) with any one other resident, in a group conversation with any two or more residents, in a group chat, which is to say a chat channel associated with a group - for example the priests group - and have voice chat as well.



figure 10. An avatar praying at the shrine of Osiris

Figure 10 shows a typical chat situation. Here my avatar is seen praying in a temple in the world. As he sits there, apparently awash in a sea of tranquility, his meatspace self is in fact engaging in several layers of chat and meta chat. In the 'Communicate' window at the top right of the image one can see many tabs, each containing a different chat. A chat with a particular friend is initiated by double clicking their name in the leftmost tab, labelled 'Contacts', which contains a list of one's friends. Subsequently a new tab opens, labelled with their name which is a private chat window with them. No other avatar can see the contents of this chat, unless, as mentioned previously, one logs it, inserts it into a notecard and disseminates it, or unless one is the system administrator, in this case Linden Lab. To the immediate right of the 'Contacts' tab is the 'Local Chat' tab. To the immediate right of this is a tab labelled 'Friends Conference'. This indicates a multi user chat between two or more persons from one's contacts list. To the immediate right of this is a tab labelled with the name 'Maat' with the remainder obscured. This is a private chat with an individual, likewise the next four tabs. The penultimate tab, partially obscured but showing 'Kingdom' is a group chat. The final tab is a private chat with another individual. Despite the fact that whenever new text appears in any given tab the tab will flash, it is often hard to keep track of these conversations. It is possible to separate the tabs so the entirety of each one is fully revealed at all times, but there is obviously a limit to how many of these separated tabs it is feasible to have on the screen at one time.

Apart from this visual layering of conversations there are many other layerings occurring. For instance, these chats will usually be populated by many of the same people. That is to say that those chatting in a multi user conference may well be a subset of those present in local chat, group chats and private chats. Multi user conferences are often used as a way of establishing a clique. Because one must be invited to join a conference people often run these multi user group chats populated by their friends and excluding those in the sim of whom they are not particularly fond. It is sometimes the case in a role play community that the main role play may well

be taking place in one of these conferences instead of local chat. This makes it hard for newcomers to integrate themselves into the community. The most limiting factor to the use of multi user or group chats is that they are incredibly unstable. They would often crash, send messages out of order, or not send them at all.

Multi user conferences and group chats are also used as a way of minimising OOC chat in local when an event is occurring. Stage directions and so on may be given in a multi user or group chat leaving the local chat a much cleaner, and hence more immersive, experience. In addition to all these in world chats and meta chats it is not uncommon for one to also be sharing meatspace with another person at another computer who is likewise in the world. Or one may be conversing telephonically, or via online voice programs such as Skype. In addition to all these inputs residents may listen to the inworld music stream which allows each sim owner to stream their choice of music into the sim. Users also often either listen to music they play on their own computer or watch television or movies while in the world. Immersion in the world is therefore less of an immersive experience at many times. It can be more like a multi media assault on one's sensorium. But on many occasions one easily slips into a deeply immersive experience of flow<sup>366</sup> wherein the meatspace world fades away and one becomes the avatar.

## Role Playing

Previous to having entered Second Life I had never done any role play gaming. I never played Dungeons and Dragons. My life with computers began in 1989 as a result of an unpleasant interaction between my car, another car, and a petrol station. As a result of this unfortunate confluence of physical objects I needed a change to a more sedentary career. Computers were starting to proliferate then so I bought one. I brought home a nice shiny new 286 with 4 MB of RAM and a 40 MB hard disk and tried to work it out. I spent four days trying, and failing, to get Windows 3.1 to connect to the internet thingy I had heard about, its lack of an included TCP/IP stack producing this maddening failure. Within a week I hated it. I put the whole thing back into the box and walked away. Some time later a friend told me about a bulletin board they were a member of and came over and installed all the required protocols and software and showed me how to connect to it. There were other humans out there! I was hooked. But I never got into gaming. Primarily this was due to the fact that most games seemed to involve killing things. I tried Day of the Tentacle<sup>367</sup>, a graphic adventure game, but my failure to grok the interface led to another dismal failure. Instead I combined my interest in

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366 Csíkszentmihályi M., (1975), *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

367 Moby Games, *Maniac Mansion: Day of the Tentacle*, <https://www.mobygames.com/game/maniac-mansion-day-of-the-tentacle>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

photography with this new medium and got into Multimedia Development. Consequently I arrived in Second Life unencumbered by any experience in role play.

I was thus trepidatious when first entering this role play community. I wasn't even really sure what 'role play community' meant. Fortunately for me Ptolemaic Egypt ran role play classes. Sadly every single role play class I attended in Ptolemaic Egypt was focused on combat. In every class most of the discussion was about establishing valid scenarios for combat rather than rushing around and just attacking anybody and everybody willy nilly. Every single one. Myself and the other priests tried to introduce information about how the combatants could interact with the priests. We covered; how the priests might help combatants - for example with healing and amulets, why combatants could not attack people in the temples, and scenarios that might involve priests and combat. There was some interest in healing, until they realised it was going to be role play healing rather than something that might reset the damage level on their meter. Most of them were completely uninterested. One warrior once came to see me to ask for an amulet before going into battle. Eventually priests stopped going to classes after we had been enough times to see that this was all that was ever going to happen.

While the community I studied was a self contained community, it was also part of a wider group of communities focused on role playing historical cultures. These communities would stage inter community events, but they were mostly combat events so I didn't participate in them very much at all. These events did produce some interesting cross cultural tensions. One community that focused on role playing ancient Greece was keen to initiate inter community combat with our community. There were lengthy negotiations to try to organise an event, but in the end it failed to eventuate because one member of the Greek community, whose character was a goddess, couldn't agree to the stipulation that, for events hosted in the Egyptian sims, she wouldn't be able to play that character.

## Metagaming

The first thing I learned about was metagaming. The idea of role play is to experience the spontaneous interaction between participants. This spontaneity can be hampered if one person starts to dictate the actions of another. When this happens it is known as metagaming, which is strictly prohibited, but nevertheless happens with some regularity. For example, if two avatars are fighting and one strikes the other the striker may describe the blow, but not the consequences of the blow. It is then up to the struck avatar to determine and describe the consequences. Thus "I punch you in the face" is allowed, but "I punch you in the face and you bleed" is not allowed. The latter constrains the struck avatar to a particular outcome and is seen as forcing one's own expected outcome on the other. It seems quite obvious why such a thing would be prohibited, if the goal is to experience spontaneous

interaction, and to allow both parties free expression. Nevertheless the metagaming ban was a constant source of contention, especially in combat. Oftentimes a resident would assert that the result described by their opponent was not sufficient in comparison to their actions. The solution to this problem was the advent of gaming meters. Such meters control and describe the interaction between opponents and their weapons. Meters require the use of weapons particular to, or compliant with, them and include various types of functionality. The Ptolemaic Egypt sims used the Gorean Meter<sup>368</sup> and only weapons compatible with this system were allowed in the sims. When opponents using such weapons undertake combat, each blow is recorded by the meter and the combatant's health score is adjusted accordingly. When one's health falls to zero one is dead. This results in differing actions depending on the metering system used. A common result is that one's avatar would be rendered immobile for a set period of time. Capture is also possible, with some systems rezzing a cage around a captured avatar.

It was mandatory for all avatars in the Ptolemaic Egypt sims to wear a meter. This was a source of some concern. While most of the members of the community were heavily involved in combat role play, others, among them myself, had no desire to participate, and saw it as one segment of the community imposing their will on another. They saw it as a kind of metagaming. One reason being that if one had no desire to participate in combat one could be forced to do so, and indeed killed, by being set upon by another, as long as one was wearing a meter. While it was specified in the role play classes that combat should be consensual, and the rationale for any particular instance of combat must be role played, i.e. one may not simply set upon another with no warning, it was a common occurrence that this would happen, especially when violence was used as an outlet for OOC grievances.

As the sim rules explicitly stated that "there are no safe zones", another reason for not wishing to wear a meter was that by not doing so one could create combat free zones. For example priests could enforce the social prohibition against violence in the temples by not wearing meters. Most priests however complied with the rules and wore meters, but I never wore one. Even though it was declared mandatory to wear meters the Pharaoh, played by the sim owner Horemheb, applying his usual selective enforcement of rules, never forced me to do so. He and I had many discussions about this. Me telling him that violence in the temples would have been unthinkable in ancient Egypt and that as he had instituted a 'no safe zones' rule I was taking the action of not wearing a meter in order to protest this rule. He in turn saying he though combat should be allowed everywhere but that he wasn't going to enforce the rule and make me wear one as he liked the tension generated by the fact that ardent combatants couldn't fight me. He wasn't perturbed by the fact that his rule was at odds with ancient Egyptian social mores, he just thought it was funny to watch people get frustrated. This was to have interesting consequences when a dispute arose between myself as

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368 Sao, A., Lowell, J., (2007), *Gorean Meter*, <http://gm.mivabe.nl/>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

high priest and a general of the army. The latter sought to resolve the OOC dispute by applying violence to the high priest, but was thwarted by the fact I wore no meter. This will be described in detail in a later section.

Metagaming is also anything that uses information or actions from outside the world to influence events inside the world, e.g. hacking the meter system or one's character having knowledge they couldn't possibly have. For example if one meets an avatar for the first time in role play, even though the avatar's name is displayed over the avatar's head by the client, one has to pretend one doesn't know the name as the character the avatar is playing couldn't have this information.

Other actions that are considered metagaming are to use facilities of the client that amount to the avatar doing things they couldn't do. For example an avatar can't teleport around or fly during role play if their character couldn't reasonably be supposed to do such things. Flying was completely banned in Ptolemaic Egypt. While it is easy to prevent avatars flying in a sim, there is a setting in the estate controls<sup>369</sup> to turn flying on or off for the entire sim, stopping avatars teleporting was more problematic as it isn't possible to turn it off completely. The estate controls do allow one to restrict teleporting to certain locations, i.e. one can set it so that there is a single point in the sim that avatars are allowed to teleport to, but point to point teleporting would be impossible. This allows avatars to arrive in the sim but not to teleport around it. Sim owners would often exploit this feature to force visitors to enter through a shop in an effort to fund their sim. This was the case with Ptolemaic Egypt until so many members of the community complained that they were sick of having to walk all the way through a quite extensive many leveled shop every time they wanted to enter the sim that Horemheb relented and provided a members entrance. Eventually utilities became available that allowed users to teleport to any point in a sim, even if teleporting was disabled or restricted at the sim level. This frustrated owners but was widely used due to its great utility.

## Animations, Gestures And Emoting

Another basic component of role playing is emoting, which means to describe actions in text, for example, 'I pick up a scroll'. I am uncertain of the derivation of emote, though it has certainly been around since Internet Relay Chat (IRC) first arose. However its usage seems to be quite at odds with the meaning one would expect the word to have, as it is mostly used to describe actions, though it can be used for feelings. I can however say why the term exists. In Second Life detailed actions by avatars are just not possible. Gestures and animations are the only means of causing the avatar to perform discrete actions.

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<sup>369</sup> A set of controls that are only accessible to the sim owner and which allow the control of all aspects of the management of the sim. See - [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Estate\\_Menu](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Estate_Menu)



Gestures are preprogrammed animations, usually with accompanying sounds, that can cause the avatar to perform a limited set of actions. There are a set of gestures included in the Second Life client, examples of which are wave, laugh, clap and bow, and a much wider range can be purchased from the Second Life Marketplace. The gestures included in the client are ludicrously exaggerated and wildly stereotypical, and for these reasons are rarely used, except by noobs. In Ptolemaic Egypt the use of gestures was prohibited, leaving animations as the only way to exactly control one's avatar.

Animations are usually a single action, must be purchased and are cumbersome to use. For these reasons, even though there is a range of animations available in the Marketplace, they are not frequently used in role play. Exceptions to this are that they may be employed in a particular place for a particular thing, usually in the form of poseballs. For example if an avatar was going to the temple to pray they might find a poseball there with a praying action in it. Although usually poseballs will have a single action in them it is possible to create longer animations to produce a set of actions. For example I programmed an animation that would have the avatar perform the various actions of a particular prayer ritual. This is rarely done as it is a time consuming activity which requires the use of external programs such as Poser<sup>370</sup> or QAvimator<sup>371</sup> and few residents have such skills. Recently animations have become available which are created with motion capture technology. This results in much more realistic animations. These are quite expensive, in Second Life terms, and are not yet widely used.

While the avatar is sitting on the poseball and the animation plays the resident loses all control over the avatar. This reduces immersion as one is no longer being the avatar in quite the same way. Watching one's avatar performing a particular animated action creates an odd sensation that the avatar is possessed, as one has the perception that the avatar should only do what one makes it do. Another problem with poseballs is that the animations in them are made to suit an avatar of an average size. If one's avatar is much outside the size the animation has been made to suit then the actions will appear awkward. This is particularly noticeable with poseballs that come in pairs. An example would be a pair of poseballs designed to simulate two avatars hugging. In the case of a very tall avatar hugging a very short avatar the problem would be seen at its most extreme. The short avatar's face would be in the tall avatar's abdomen for the duration of the hug, as the tall avatar has no capacity to bend down to adjust the hug to suit the short recipient. A fat avatar being hugged by a thin one would result in the thin avatar's arms intersecting the fat avatar, and in fact disappearing inside their torso. Such things also reduce immersion. This is presently an inevitable consequence of the nature of the medium.

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370 Smith Micro Software, Inc., *Poser 3D Animation & Character Creation Software*, <http://poser.smithmicro.com/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

371 QAvimator, *QAvimator*, <http://qavimator.org/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.



Emoting is the logical solution to these shortcomings. One may, using text, describe any situation without any props being required. There was a fine line between emoting and metagaming, especially where combat was concerned. One may not emote for another. However the rules of combat in Ptolemaic Egypt implied that once one was captured a procedure must be followed that would, in any other situation, be considered to be metagaming. For example, as described in the notecard below, once one was captured one must act as if one was unconscious until one's captor role played an awakening. Moreover being captured was the only scenario in which it was allowed for an opponent to role play killing without the meter declaring one to be dead. Capturing was far more popular than just fighting until the meter declared one or the other dead.

The following notecard example was produced by the combatants and explains the procedure for dealing with a captured opponent and gives examples of how one might emote the capture. Once the meter reached a certain threshold one was considered captured. Often a cage would be rezzed around the victim, and victim they certainly were. As described in the notecard, it was mandatory to bind one's captive. Other scenarios were not allowed. Letting them go was not an option. To me this seemed like metagaming. Surely once captured there was a possibility that one might escape, or offer to change sides, or offer information for one's release. The rules dictated that the only option was bondage. At first, I saw an amazing array of detailed and exceptionally violent role plays involving captives. Eventually I chose to remain in the temple and avoid combat scenarios as much as possible.

## Notecard - Role Play Example: Capture

When you capture an opponent, their meter shows that they are caged and down. In role play, that means they are unconscious/knocked out and or wounded. Your capture is down for 4 min. You have 4 min then to emote checking the captive for their weapons, taking their weapons, tossing aside, and or destroying their weapons.

You then must emote taking out rope or straps of some type, placing the rope or strap around the wrists/arms and tying a knot securely. You must then again emote the same process for the legs. Once that is complete, you may then click on your captives cage and have them bound. To leash your captive and take them with you, you must then emote tying a leash to them and then dragging them away.

Here is an example:

"Walks over to the barbarian and picks up his bow"

"Taking the bow, I smash it over my knee and toss the pieces to the side"

"I then check the barbarian for other weapons, take those weapons and toss them far away hidden from sight"

"I take rope from my belt and grab the arms, wrapping the rope around the wrists, ties a knot and making sure it is secure"

"I then move to the legs wrap them as well and tie a secure knot"

"I take some more rope and thread it thru the bindings making a leash"  
"I then drag the captive off with me"

While that emote is not the greatest example of role play, it is basic, effective and works. We all know that in live combat situations, it is difficult to take the time to emote a lot of descriptive narrative. So, the example above is considered a MIN effort in role play capture binding. You may of course do more if time allows, and also engage your captive once they start to become more conscious (as their meter clocks down). You can emote getting your captive to speak to you, if you desire, by kicking them, pouring water on them, or other ways to get them to talk. That's part of the fun of role play.

If you are captured, it means that you are to lay still. You may emote being knocked out or wounded, but, you cannot engage in dialogue with your opponent, unless of course they emote waking you up. In other words, you can't talk to each other directly. While you are down, you may emote that you are wounded, or are bleeding etc. Please be aware however, that those wounds, if too severe will stop you from escaping later if you have the chance. As an example you emote that you have been badly wounded and cannot be dragged away without the dragging killing you. Or that you are badly wounded and you are bleeding to death and need a physician. Your opponent may just let you bleed to death and help you to die rather than get you help to live. Remember, role play is a series of actions and reactions, so like chess, think your moves ahead of the emote.

Here is an example:

"Having been hit and down, I lay here, the blood dripping from my mouth"  
"Unconscious, I cough up blood onto the hot sand"  
"I cough again and again, the blood now oozing out of my mouth"  
"I feel myself coming in and out of consciousness, losing blood now I don't know if I can make it"  
"I awaken (the meter timed out), to find myself tied up and choking on the taste of dried blood and sand in my mouth"  
"Water, I cry out.....WATER!"

Then someone says..... "Dude, we are in the fuckn desert ok, you suck at rp, so shut up. If you don't shut the fuck up, Im gonna kill you"

THAT IS NOT ROLE PLAY. THAT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

Do we all see the difference here?

A huge range of props for bondage and torture were for sale in the Marketplace. One could purchase wounds to apply to make one appear bloodied, or burnt, or a whole range of unpleasant outcomes. Certain role players would invariably rape and torture their captives. The vizier was notorious for this. She was also notorious for not waiting until one was captured in order to do so. This is yet another example of how Horemheb would set rules but then selectively enforce them on the basis of whether or not he liked the person or if he thought it might be fun not to.

The following notecard example was produced by the priests and gives an example of how to role play greetings. This card is quite different in character from the capture example card. Obviously it is written in an entirely different register from the combat card. But most notably the capture card could be for any capture sim in Second Life, while the greeting example card conveys information specific to role playing in ancient Egypt.

## Notecard - Role Play Example: Greetings

For some of you reading this, Role Play (RP) is a new concept, for others RP has been practiced over many different peoples and places, in either case, RP here in ancient Egypt is new to all of us.

Simply stated, each of us are learning, growing, and developing our RP as we move forward. What we do and say, and how we act and behave, others will notice and take note, copy or try and imitate. Watching and listening to others is a great way to develop some of your RP.

In addition, there are and will be visitors from other lands who will come here seeking to RP with us. Their impression of our RP will be based upon you, and first impressions, in this case, mean a lot.

Taking RP seriously, for some may seem a chore, or work, (you should be reading and getting familiar with the history of ancient Egypt), yet this "homework" will help you to better understand and communicate more effectively with others in RP. This basic platform of knowledge allows you to take on your role with more confidence. Once you feel confident in your RP, well, that's where the fun begins.

RULE #1: While you can see and read others Titles and profile pages, you do not, and can not, use that information in ROLE PLAY. If you meet someone for the first time, you must RP finding out who they are, where they are from, what they do etc. Sometimes, looking at what they wear gives you some clues. As an example, generally, when you see a Roman, they will look like a Roman would, so you could assume that you are talking to a Roman. If you see that their title says, Roman senator, but they do not say that to you, then you don't know that they are a senator. If you ask them in RP, "what business do you have here Roman?" and they say to you "I come from the Senate of Rome, with business for the Pharaoh", you now know they are a Senator.

Here are some basic examples of how to greet:

Standards/Examples for Role Play.

Greetings.

Pharaoh:

If in range to greet the Pharaoh, you first would bow, then give praise. Then be silent and wait.

Example: Sees his/her God approaching and bows to his divine presence.

1. "My god, please forgive this one for being in your sight, I am not worthy of such an honor.

2. "His Majesty, lord of the two lands, praise the son of Ra"

3. "Praise to my God, my Egypt, I am your humble servant"

Anything like that. If you are not sure, just IM others and ask. Never use the word "Pharaoh" to address your God. Depending upon your level and or who is around the Pharaoh at the time, he may speak to others and have them speak to you, or he may address you himself. If he does not speak to you, you bow again, back up and walk away.

Most people would never see the Pharaoh up close, never mind have a chance to speak to him. If they did get close enough, they would be overwhelmed. The Pharaoh to all is a living God. The link between all Egyptians and the Gods.

Royalty:

All are greeted with full title if you have met them before. If not, and you can tell by their dress that they are royal, then assume it and greet them.

"I give praise and greeting to the royal house of Egypt" or "Em Hotep, I am your humble servant"

All:

"Em Hotep"

Leaving.

Pharaoh:

Bow and walk backward giving praise.

Royal:

Bow and walk backward with salutation "Senebty (whomever)"

All:

"Senebty"



## 4. Priestly Life

It wasn't long after I had given Amon my completed copy of the application to join the community that he got back to me to say I had been accepted into the main group. Now that that had been accomplished Amon gave me an application for the priesthood. Once I had filled this in and then been accepted by the council of high priests I would be able to be initiated into the *wab* grade of the priesthood. This was the lowest grade to which all newcomers were initiated. I filled in my application and returned it to Amon.

### Notecard - My Petition To Join The Priesthood

What is your avatar's name:

Thutmose:

What do you want your Priest Name to be: (we can discuss this later)

Thutmose

How did you hear about the priesthood:

Seti

Did someone recommend you:

Yes

If so, who:

Seti

Why do you want to be a priest:

To learn and to teach.

Name an Egyptian Sun God:

Ra

Who is Osiris:

He who dwells in Andjet.

He who dwells in Heliopolis.

He who dwells in Orion with a season in the sky and a season on earth.

He who dwells in the house of Serket.

He who is the God's tent.

He who was been put in the box.

Which god is called "The Artificer":

Ptah

Who is Isis:

She who gives birth to heaven and earth.  
She who knows the orphan.  
She who knows the widow spider.  
She who seeks justice for the poor people.  
She who seeks shelter for the weak people.

Did the Egyptians believe in an afterlife:

Yes

What did the Egyptians believe happens to the soul after the body dies:

If one's heart passes the test of being weighed against Ma'at then (generally speaking, because the 'soul' has many parts) one's 'soul' goes to the afterlife.

Who is the mother of Anubis:

Nephthys, Isis, Hesat and Bastet are all given as his mother.

How many sons does Horus have:

Four.

Could the legends of the gods have secret meanings to them:

\*grin\*

If yes, explain:

Let he who has eyes to see see and he who has ears to hear hear.

Which god gave light to the Moon:

Tahuti (thoth)

Do you try to help other people:

If they ask.

Do you believe that Peace and Justice are important:

Yes.

Do you promise to serve the gods:

Define 'serve'.

Do you promise to try to make yourself better:

Yes. By my definition of 'better'.

Do you promise to follow the rules of our order:



Not without knowing them first.

Can you afford the proper attire for a Neophyte (250L):

Yes.

Do you solemnly promise and swear that you have answered honestly?

Always.

Amon advised me that the first high priest, at that time it was Paiankh, would contact me and make a time for my initiation ceremony. In due course I met with Paiankh. From our first conversations I gained the impression that he had been a high priest in this community for some time but it turned out he had been there for less than a month. It was Paiankh who had been the impetus for the forming of a priesthood in the sim in the first instance. Prior to that there had been a temple but no priests. From my conversations with Paiankh I was able to discern that he was a Mason and an occultist in meatspace, he had been initiated into a temple of the Stella Matutina, as well as being a Martinist, and took the initiation rituals in Second Life very seriously. In fact I cannot provide here a transcript of my initiation ritual as he asked for it not to be published. Paiankh had said I was to be initiated into the lowest level, a *wab* priest, but after reading my application card he decided to admit me to the second level, as a *hem netjer*. In ancient Egypt a *wab* priest was an assistant to the *hem netjer* whose role it was to see to the maintenance of the temple<sup>372</sup>. A *hem netjer* required a higher level of purity as their duties included preparing offerings and having access to the sanctuary to perform rituals<sup>373 374</sup>.

## Thutmose's Initiation

My initiation ritual was to be my first experience of participating in a ritual in a virtual space. I had participated in a great many rituals in meatspace during the course of my life and, despite my panentheistic conceptions, I was unsure that the feeling of sacred space one perceives during an effective ritual, or in a special place, could be achieved in a virtual world. I was expecting a role play. But I threw myself into it. When it came time to do the ritual I prepared myself as I would have for a meatspace ritual. I bathed and dressed myself in clean clothes, after which I meditated, which I did in the space I normally undertook my meatspace rituals in, into which I had also moved my computer. Rising from meditation I girded myself with the technology required to enter the virtual space: a quite frankly massively powerful computer before me

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372 Shafer, B. E., Arnold, D., Haeny, G., Bell, L., Finnestad, R. B., (2005), *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, pp. 10-12.

373 Shafer, B. E., Arnold, D., Haeny, G., Bell, L., Finnestad, R. B., (2005), *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, pp. 10-12.

374 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 20-21.

equipped with the very latest in graphic card grunt, twin monitors and masses of RAM. As I placed my fingers on my keyboard it felt like a ritual object. There was, suddenly, now that I was inserting myself into ritual awareness, a richer significance to it than its mundane self. It was an affordance that was inserting me deeper into virtual space. I started up the Second Life client and logged in.

As the world rezzed before me I was filled with excitement and anticipation, but also reserve. I suffer from a particular form of perfectionism which serves to seriously curtail opportunities for genuine excitement. I dwelt on the limitations of the interface. There would be no touch, no smell, no voices of those around me. Lag<sup>375</sup> would conspire against me. My control over my avatar would be limited. Gestures are extremely unrefined in Second Life and fine control over one's extremities impossible. I had not yet obtained an animation override (AO) (a set of custom animations of walking, standing and sitting that make one's avatar move more realistically) and the lack of which was a sure mark of a noob. So I walked with the clunky gait of a noob. I was just beginning to discover that the avatar was 'I'. I had a clunky gait. The natural, practiced flow of bodily movement essential to an effective ritual could not happen in the same way as one makes transparent actions with one's meatspace body. I would have to recall the actions required by the client to facilitate even the simplest movements and perform them at the appropriate times via a mouse and keyboard.

There had been no practice for this ritual. I had read the notecard describing how it would unfold, but not gone through the motions. I was only just getting to know my avatar's character, who he was, what his motivations were, how he fit into his society. At this time my avatar was more myself than himself. I had never done a ritual with people I knew as scantily as those present. I was revealing myself to strangers. But it was at one remove, my uncertainties filtered by the pseudonymity of cyberspace. It was only a role play, only a game. An initiation is a testing of the candidate, but this ritual was also me testing Paiankh and Seti. Would they be competent ritualists and role players? Was this priesthood a role play game, an educational opportunity or the doorway to a genuine spiritual awakening?

Seti summoned me to the temple and I followed him in. Then my avatar replicated the pre-ritual preparation I had done in meatspace. He bathed, donned a robe and meditated. We did it together, he and I, his actions a powerful echo of my meatspace self's. I hadn't been in that temple space before and, as I was new to Second Life at that time, had a bit of difficulty in negotiating the small spiral staircase that led to the inner chamber. Once there I found Paiankh, robed in white and holding an Ankh topped staff, standing behind a black rectangular altar with a glowing, white, particle effect on it<sup>376</sup>. There was an eye of Horus on the wall behind him, but otherwise the temple was quite plain. A priestess, with whom I was not acquainted, was also

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375 Delay caused by network congestion.

376 Particle effects are how Second Life does cloud like effects.

present. Seti was in his long red robe and the priestess was in a long plain white robe. Seti led me in to stand in front of the altar facing Paiankh (see figure 11). The ritual began. There was more to this ritual than just reciting set lines. I would have to answer questions I had not known of ahead of time. How would I answer them? I knew it would be the meatspace me answering them. I didn't know enough about Egyptian religion or culture to know what the appropriate response for my character would be. But I tried to imagine it.



figure 11. My initiation ritual

Suddenly there was no time for thinking. I must go here, stand there, face this way, say scripted lines, smash this red pot, take my clothes off. I entered a state of flow, consideration of the meatspace world faded and the locus of my attention was firmly in the virtual space. As my avatar disrobed I felt revealed. I was naked. This was concerning for a couple of reasons. Firstly, not having been in the world for very long at all, and never having been naked among other avatars, I was totally unprepared for the dawning realisation of the strength of the connection to my avatar that I felt. Secondly, I had no penis. Despite Amon's urgings as to the value of investing in genitals, I had felt no need or desire to obtain any. But once I was standing naked in the ritual I suddenly felt their lack. This early strong experience of connection and identification with my avatar was one of being strangely, vulnerably, emasculated. Can an avatar be emasculated if he had never had a penis to start with? Soon this passed as I came to focus on the minutiae of the ritual once more. The unknown questions arose and I answered them. I moved my avatar appropriately, had him perform those actions he could and role played those he couldn't. And then I noticed it. I was in sacred space. That special

perception generated by ritual was present. While I remained in my flow state, the perception of sacred space seemed to be there in the temple in cyberspace, my meatspace perceptions in retreat. The ritual ended and quite quickly everyone logged off. This was because there were participants from the US, the UK and Australia. Any event requiring persons from these three time zones results in it being a madly late or early hour for at least two of them. People had either just escaped the warm embrace of Morpheus or were especially keen to enter it. Suddenly I noticed the reassertion of the primacy of the meatspace reality. Thutmose was alone in the temple. I was here in meatspace watching him. I could still feel the presence of sacred space, but now it seemed to be in meatspace. The sensation was so pervasive that I felt I had to do the closing section of my normal meatspace ritual in order to have a sense of finality. I did so, and it felt as I did when I had just completed a ritual in meatspace. Despite my expectations, what had started as a role play had ended as an effective ritual.

Well might one ask where exactly this sacred space was: in the virtual space or in meatspace? As far as I know, the avatar has no perceptions. Therefore I posit that I was experiencing it where the 'I' was to perceive it, with the virtual as one source of input for my sensorium. But what a powerful source of input it is. The question then becomes, where is the I that is perceiving? Certainly the physical body is in meatspace, but perhaps the experience of cyberspace is akin to the experience of astral space. Where is the experience located when one encounters the divine in astral space? In such a case the body is still in meatspace but one's perceptions are totally removed from it. One's consciousness is entirely turned from the body and into the non corporeal astral space. This same thing happens in cyberspace: one loses perception of the self as body centered and becomes the avatar. In this case where is the sacred space?

Perhaps the sacred is attached to cyberspace in the same way it attaches to meatspace? We can't measure it in meatspace and so we don't know how to say by empirical means that it is present. Perhaps the same holds true of cyberspace? Perhaps the sacred is injected into cyberspace by the direction of our will. I know that sacred space exists because I perceive it. I can feel it in the same way other non measurable things are known to me, like love.

The virtual is often compared to meatspace by means of what it is lacking. But it doesn't stand alone. We cannot abjure our physical senses. Cannot, as in Disch's *On Wings of Song*<sup>377</sup> leave our physical bodies so far behind as to be completely unaware of them. This virtual input source is in fact added to the meatspace experience, so it produces extra layers of stimulation, rather than the more commonly perceived lack thereof. We have more eyes not less, more bodies than we would have should we have our meatspace bodies alone. More opportunities to enrich our experience, not less.

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377 Disch, T. M., (1981), *On Wings of Song*, Magnum Books, London.

## OOC v RL - The Demise Of Paiankh

Invigorated and exciting by the effectiveness of Thutmose's initiation ritual I was keen for more. However the next time I logged in to the world there was grave news. Paiankh had been banned! This began as a role play with Meresankh, the vizier, and a prince who was next in line to the throne. Meresankh had summoned Paiankh to see the prince, who was ill. She insisted he heal the prince there and then, but his reply was that the energy of the place was not good for healing so he preferred to move the sick man to his quarters where a more suitable energetic atmosphere prevailed. The move accomplished, the prince was healed.

Paiankh had presumed all was well, but Meresankh had seemingly taken offence OOC at his not obeying her exactly in role play. She had decided to enact this in role play by cutting off all funds and food to the temple and accusing Paiankh of high treason. The prince whose life Paiankh had saved tried to intercede on his behalf, but Meresankh insisted Paiankh was a traitor and must stand trial. Paiankh was confident that all would be well as the prince would mediate for him in thanks for his life saving healing. Paiankh was brought before the vizier, who promptly banished him. The Pharaoh, Horemheb, apparently had nothing to say. In conversation Paiankh confided that this was all a very interesting twist in the role play devised by Meresankh, with whom he was, he said, OOC friends. It would be a fun jaunt, he would stay out of the sim for a few days to show he was banished, but before we knew it he would be back as high priest.

Days went by. A week, and Paiankh had not returned. In Second Life the sim owner can set a list of avatars who are banned from their sim. Until one is removed from this list there is no entry to the sim. Horemheb put out a proclamation that Paiankh had been banned permanently for "preaching the teachings of the Hebrew god". Although Paiankh couldn't come into the Ptolemaic Egypt sims he could still be in the world. He messaged to say that we should all be patient, that Horemheb had explained to him that it would all be resolved in role play real soon now. It wasn't. Paiankh was never seen again in Ptolemaic Egypt. Soon Meresankh was bragging to anyone who would listen that if anyone should fail to obey the Vizier in even the smallest way they would be banned, forever. I tried to speak to Horemheb to ask him about it but he declined to even answer. This was the first time I was to see this mix of OOC and role play disputes. It would not be the last.

Although in this case it seems that Paiankh never came back to Ptolemaic Egypt, it is in fact impossible to know for sure. He could have simply made another account and returned. In practice, when banned, people tend to either leave for good or make a new account and an alternative avatar, known as an alt, and return and try to cause as much trouble as they can before the alt is identified and banned. Alts are usually easy to spot as they don't have much in

the way of attire as, despite the very low meatspace dollar value of avatar clothing, many people are loath to have to pay again for outfits for an alt which they have already paid for once for their main avatar.

Once it was obvious Paiankh wouldn't be coming back, Amon was appointed high priest by the Pharaoh. He filled this role for two weeks until he too had a clash with the vizier. His response was to resign. He assured me that Horemheb would be asking him to return as soon as he realised the nature of the dispute with Meresankh. Instead Horemheb appointed Seti to be high priest. Amon was deeply hurt and felt he had been seriously wronged by Horemheb. He wasn't in the world for a few days. But then he returned and said he supported Seti as high priest.

Being the author of books about Egyptian religion Seti was very keen to develop the priesthood. He gave me a great deal of encouragement to participate and he had a sincere desire to try to raise the standard of knowledge within the priesthood, which he did by providing good quality information about priestly activities.

## Notecard - What Priests Do

What priests do

For most of us, priestly duties are not all that we do - we must combine them with our main mundane occupation. We have very few full time priests. To make things easier, most of the instructions for a particular office are written down in manuscripts or carved in hieroglyphs on the walls of the shrines.

In the previous notecard, I described the form of the basic Egyptian hut-shrine that has remained largely unchanged since our ancestors first carried it across the western desert to the banks of the Nile.

Whereas the first shrines faced north, it is more common these days for them to be orientated to the east, so that the rising sun falls up the face of the divine image inside the shrine. At the western end of the shrine, is a false door, through which the spirit (Ba) of the god may make an appearance.

The priest(s) enter via the eastern door.

Three times every day, (dawn, midday and dusk) the priest approaches the shrine carrying the necessary supplies and equipment.

There are special utterances, spells and ritual actions to accompany each of the seven steps of the daily rite.

1. Entry
2. Opening the double doors of the shrine
3. First sight of, and adoration of the god.

4. Purification of the sanctuary

5. Preparation of the god - cleansing the statue,

6. Provisioning and robing of the god and their shrine. Crowning and sceptering

(it is at this stage that the spirit of the god may appear through the "false" western door and on some occasions give a message or oracle)

7. Exit

This is the basic daily pattern that would be embellished for other cults and on other ritual occasions. For example the cult of Osiris has some extra components, offerings of incense, etc.

I suggest that the shrine might be left open for a set period to allow the god to "enjoy" the moment and to be "seen".

Clothing and food offerings from the previous event are taken as offering (reversions) to the shrines of the ancestors.

A similar daily rite is done in their shrines. The offerings from these are consumed by the priests (reversion) or given to visitors and pilgrims to the temple.

A great deal of other religious activity, festivals, etc - are contingent on the performance of these daily rites. Any viable priesthood needs to be performing these activities, if not three times a day at least periodically. The King is the chief servant of the gods and as such always takes seriously his duty to sustain the above temple service.

[I will be around in about 12 hours time at zero hour SLT if anyone want to talk about some of these ideas - probably on the roof of the temple of Amun is available)

Seti

Seti instituted regular temple rituals, which he would dutifully perform, even if no others were present. The timing of these rituals was problematic. In ancient Egypt they were performed in the morning, midday and in the evening<sup>378</sup>. But these terms are problematic when you have a globally dispersed community. Seti encouraged others to attend these rituals, but was seriously handicapped by the fact that he was in Europe and most members of the sim were in the USA. It meant he wasn't often able to be in the sim at the peak times for Americans. His solution to this problem was to appoint a high priest from each of three disparate time zones, himself, one American and one Australian. That way, for most hours of the day at least, one priest would be in the temple. Seti set the times of the rituals so that one would occur during

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378 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., pp. 123-210.

each of the three high priests' times online. This was important, as if one wanted to attract members to one's sim one had to be there whenever newcomers first arrived, and one had to have interesting events happening when they were there.

## I Settle In To The Priesthood

Soon I was spending a lot of time in Egypt. Often twelve or more hours a day. I began to feel a pressing need to improve my avatar's appearance again. I was still wearing the robe Seti had recommended at the time I joined Ptolemaic Egypt and the default avatar skin. As can be seen in the image of an avatar from this time (see figure 12) the robe was a very plain affair and didn't look particularly Egyptian. The skin didn't look like real human skin and the details were simple in the extreme, e.g. toes were just lines drawn on the background. I was comparing my avatar to those of other avatars in the sims and finding it wanting. I was embarrassed on behalf of my avatar. This embarrassment had two expressions. On the one hand I would talk to my avatar and express how I felt sorry for him for having such a basic skin and outfit. On the other hand I would feel embarrassment for myself on account of his outfit. He was simultaneously an other and yet myself. I felt his embarrassment both vicariously and at one remove. Yet how can an avatar have embarrassment for me to experience vicariously? He had no consciousness, as far as I knew. He never actually spoke to me to tell me he did anyway. Yet there it was. I went shopping.



figure 12. An early male avatar

At this time the first photorealistic avatar skins were appearing. Up until this time avatar skins had been drawn and as a result looked pretty cartoon like. But Second Skin Labs had just introduced a range of skins that were renowned for their realism. Many people spoke of them but few purchased them due to their price. At \$L10,000 they were far and away the most expensive item I had seen for sale in the world. But they were beautiful (see figure 13). Fabulously realistic, with exceptional detail, the like of which I had never seen before in an avatar skin. They made the avatar look like a real person rather than a cartoon facsimile. The skin was rendered in great detail, and, best of all, it wasn't perfect. It was a real person's skin, with wrinkles and imperfections. It had a scar on the face! I had to have it. I

figured it was less than I spent on cups of coffee for a week, and I would certainly get more mileage out of it than I did the coffee.



As tempting as it was to have Thutmose walk around naked so I could behold the beauty of his new skin, clearly such a handsome fellow would need a new outfit. There was just one problem. I hated shopping. It was laborious. Web based online digital goods marketplaces were only just beginning and had a very limited range of items. Most merchants I spoke to felt they would never take off as they thought people preferred



figure 13. Thutmose with his new skin

to visit inworld stores. This turned out to be wildly inaccurate, with web based marketplaces now accounting for the vast majority of sales of digital goods.

There are many drawbacks to traipsing around shops in the world. First one had to find them. The Second Life's inworld search (and later the Marketplace search) was bad, famously bad<sup>379 380 381</sup>, and it remains so to this day. So bad that everyone relied heavily on personal recommendations from others as to the locations of useful shops. This meant that one had to have good connections with others in order to find the best stuff, which of course made it very hard for new users. They would be able to see other avatars dressed in good quality, relevant attire, but have no hope of finding out where to obtain it without asking. When asked, many people would refuse to say where they had obtained an item lest they soon discover every other avatar in the community wearing the same thing. This lack of an adequate search facility was, and continues to be, one of the major Achilles heels of the world. New residents just can't find things. As far as goods go this situation has been ameliorated by the web based marketplaces, but for events and destinations it still holds true. Once one has found a shop one wishes to visit, one must then go there. There was no way to be sure than any given merchant might even have the goods one sought in their shop without actually visiting it. Arriving in a new sim means a delay while the sim rezzes. This means bandwidth is used, and bandwidth is expensive. I knew of many users of the world who only ever stayed in the one place as their data plans didn't afford them enough

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379 Second Life Forum, (2012), *SL search is broken all time - Let's build up a better search!*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Wanted/SL-search-is-broken-all-time-Let-s-build-up-a-better-search/td-p/1515729>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

380 Second Life Forum, (2011), *Search Does NOT Work!!!*, <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Second-Life-Viewer/Search-Does-NOT-Work/td-p/763479>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

381 Saarinen, C., (2010), *Second Life's Class Warfare and the Gentleman from San Francisco*, [http://secondthoughts.typepad.com/second\\_thoughts/2010/06/class-warfare-and-the-gentleman-from-san-francisco.html](http://secondthoughts.typepad.com/second_thoughts/2010/06/class-warfare-and-the-gentleman-from-san-francisco.html), Accessed 02/04/2014.

bandwidth to allow them to go anywhere. Even if one did frequent the same place the caching in the Second Life client was so bad that almost everything was reloaded each time one returned. Invariably one would arrive in the shop and wait for the world to rez, and wait, and wait. Shops have lots of items in them. The more items, the longer it takes to download. Adjusting one's draw distance helped, but there was always a delay. One would have to set a reasonably high draw distance if one had any hope of finding one's way around a shop. Shopping was not fun, for me, though many people loved it and did little else.

Then came the digital goods web stores. They began to spring up, metaverse exchange, MySLMarket, but the most popular was Xstreet. There one could peruse items for sale in the world on a web page rather than having to tediously tramp around the world. Their searches were also pretty ordinary, but at least less bandwidth was used visiting them than visiting shops in the world. They made shopping whole orders of magnitude less time consuming. The people who loved shopping would spend hours visiting shops and finding stuff. These were the people one had to know if one wanted to find the best stuff. Perhaps unsurprisingly most of these were female avatars. This meant that those of us with male avatars had a much harder time finding things.

At the time I had an ADSL 1 connection. ADSL stands for asymmetric digital subscriber line, the asymmetric part creating a bottle neck when using Second Life. With an asymmetric technology speeds for downloading and uploading differ, with the speed for downloading being much faster than that for uploading. Asynchronous technologies have been the norm since the demise of dial up connections and ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network). These technologies suit most home internet users as normal internet traffic usually results in more data coming into the user's home than going out. For example, in normal web browsing a user will visit a number of websites and will need to download the data that comprises the web pages from the site, images, text, sound files and so on, but they will only upload a small amount of data, as the only uploaded data is that used for the purpose of verifying the receipt of the downloaded data or any data inputted by the user into forms etc. ADSL usually provides a maximum download speed of 8 megabits and a maximum upload speed of 1.3 megabits. However the speed varies with distance from the exchange and also varies depending on where the traffic is coming from. Second Life had no servers in Australia, so I was always connecting to a US server and I found that I actually achieved speeds of around 1.2 megabits down and 175 kilobits up. This was at the low end of the range of speeds required to allow Second Life to function adequately.

The problem of this low level of available bandwidth was compounded by the fact that Second Life requires both a higher ratio of upload to download speed than web traffic and a large amount of overall traffic. This is because Second Life requires real time interaction. When accessing the world one is not only downloading the large quantity of data from the server required to describe the world; terrain, objects, textures, scripts, sounds, et cetera, which all

change constantly as one moves around in the world, but also one needs to be constantly exchanging information with the server about the position of other avatars around one, while simultaneously transmitting the data that describes the movements of one's own avatar. Additionally Second Life has the capacity for voice calls between users, another high bandwidth application. Moreover in addition to these basic functionalities required to simply use the world, building in Second Life requires that one must upload textures, sounds, scripts, video files, and so on, which also require a great deal of data to be uploaded. This means that not only does one require a fast internet connection, one also requires a lot of data. Internet access plans in Australia and the UK are often priced by how much data one uses, although some American users had unlimited data plans.

There are ways to mitigate bandwidth problems. One of the most effective was to control one's draw distance, which controls how far away from the avatar the world would be rendered. The higher the number set, the more data would be required. Setting the draw distance too high might result in one using one's entire month's data allowance in a few hours if one didn't have a very expansive data allowance. But adjusting this setting has complications. A group of avatars might be interacting in the world and one of them might try to direct the attention of the others to an object some distance away. This might result in puzzled responses from those compelled to have a low draw distance value set on account of either the speed of their connection or the amount of data they have purchased from their ISP. This is another aspect of the problem of not having any feedback on what other avatars are seeing which I discussed earlier.

While it is true that this is a limitation of Second Life that makes some tasks that are easily performed in meatspace much harder to perform in the world, this is in fact an exact parallel with the way we walk around imagining that everyone else is seeing the world exactly the same way we do. We imagine that all humans are equally sighted for example. This leads us to experience difficulties when we have to interact with differently sighted others. I found this aspect of the world a particularly enlightening experience, as it made me much more aware of this phenomenon. As a result I became more mindful of others. I was constantly forced to spend more time trying to put myself into the other person's position lest we have massive communication failures. But I also experienced this in other ways. Having to consider how people visually saw the world made me consider how they conceptually saw the world. Were they from the same linguistic background as I? The same cultural background, the same philosophical background?

## Priestly Attire

First I tried to make Thutmose an outfit, reasoning I could get both exactly what I wanted and a unique outfit that way. However after about ten hours of searching for documentation on how to make clothes, trying to figure out what

little documentation I found, and many attempts to produce anything at all, I discovered that it was beyond me. I set it aside for the moment and decide to see what was available for sale. I was not alone. In the first community there was no one who could make clothes. In the second there was one person who could. Like good builders, these people were in high demand.

I set out to find Thutmose an outfit that was as accurate as possible to what ancient Egyptian priests actually wore. So what did they wear? Other priests in the sim told me that the ancient Egyptian priests wore all white, that they removed all body hair, didn't wear wigs and that some priests wore leopard skins, but only if they were also warriors, and that black dye was unknown to them. My first task was to verify this information.

Most of the priests said they got their information from websites, but one or two used books. Overwhelmingly those who were priests made some sort of effort to find out what ancient Egyptians actually wore. The combatants were much less inclined to do so. Most combatants simply shopped in the world and if they found an item that said it was Egyptian, and they liked it, they bought it. Priests would swap tips with each other about good items that we had found and pass this information on to new members of the priesthood. We would visit other Egyptian themed sims to see what we could find there and then share our finds with each other. Most of those who did make the effort to do some research did not cast much of a critical eye over the quality of the websites they used as resources. If they found information on the web, it was considered valid. But most high priests made substantial effort to source accurate information.

As in all things in the world people specialized. If one could make clothes, build or script one did, and supplied others with goods. If one could do high quality research, or liked to read, one did and supplied others with information. Information was another product of the community. As in any marketplace, some products are more sought after than others. Information was not the most sought after commodity in this particular marketplace. In fact I discovered that information wasn't considered a commodity at all. It was a thing that was outside of material consideration. If one had it one should distribute it freely to others. But to charge money for it was anathema. If one incorporated information into a product it was more highly valued. I made a hieroglyph game in the form of an obelisk and it was more valuable than just an obelisk. But no one would even consider buying the information without the object that was its form. This means that lessons are not saleable unless you make them into interactive experiences delivered via objects. To run a class and charge for it is unthinkable. One may have a donation box at lessons one gives, if the sim rules allow it, but Horemheb decreed that there should be no donation boxes in his community. Communities promoted themselves using information. They provided classes and asked for donations or had handily located shops to ensnare lesson goers.

The forums at the Egyptian Dreams<sup>382</sup> site were recommended to me as an accurate source of information. This site had started as an online shop selling Egyptian themed objects. It subsequently developed forums, which are frequented by some Egyptologists. This site turned out to be a great source of accurate, cited, information. The Egyptologists there seemed to have infinite time to answer endless questions in great detail. The site Egyptological<sup>383</sup>, produced by amateur Egyptologists, has good quality information along with information with a more popular appeal, and was also often referred to. Another site recommended by one of my fellows was Tour Egypt<sup>384</sup>, a site belonging to a company that specialises in tours of meatspace Egypt. The information on this site is quite basic and not referenced. Blog posts, such as this post from Abagond, entitled "How Black Was Ancient Egypt?"<sup>385</sup> were also used as sources of information. Sites that focus on Reconstructionist ancient Egyptian religion were also highly regarded. The House of Netjer<sup>386</sup> was particularly popular as it was generally considered among my fellows that if people were practicing the same religion as the ancient Egyptians then they would be an accurate source of information. Information from all these types of site was considered equally valid. I had the advantage of being able to access a university library and it was acknowledged that the standard of information was greatly increased by my arrival. Those in the sim who could build started to come to me and ask for information to inform their builds and I'd suggest books to look for, or copy information out of books and pass it on to them.

I tried to argue that academic sites, or sites with posts by academics that provided citations, might be more reliable than, for example, blog posts. Because of this some members of the community, mostly the combatants, expressed the opinion that I was "being elitist" or making things "too hard". On one occasion during a role play a combatant introduced herself to me and said that while her mother was both an Arab and a Muslim, her father was a Viking. When my character questioned her as to what a Muslim or a Viking were she expressed great consternation, explaining that all Medjay were Muslims and that Vikings were well known. She sent me OOC instant messages asking why I was "picking on her" and I explained that my character was justifiably unaware of both Muslims and Vikings as, seeing as our sim was set in 300 BCE, the former were not to exist for another nine hundred years and the latter for eleven hundred years. She did not receive this information with any enthusiasm but rather began an ad hominem attack on the deliverer. Overwhelmingly the priests however appreciated the quality of my input into the community.

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382 Egyptian Dreams, *Ancient Egyptian Discussion Board*, <http://forum.egyptiandreams.co.uk/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

383 Byrnes, A., Phizackerley, K., *Egyptological: Your free online Ancient Egypt Magazine*, <http://www.egyptological.com/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

384 Tour Egypt, *Tour Egypt*, <http://www.touregypt.net/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

385 Abagond, (2009), *How Black Was Ancient Egypt?*, <http://abagond.wordpress.com/2009/12/21/how-black-was-ancient-egypt/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

386 The House of Netjer, *The Kemetic Orthodox Faith*, <http://www.kemet.org/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

Our community was more concerned than most with accuracy. There were other Egypts in Second Life that were much less focused on historical accuracy. One had pyramids with electric lighting, most had landscapes of nothing but sand. One had regular fireworks displays. Most didn't have dress guidelines and were populated with Egyptians in high heels, togas and Gor clothing. Gor clothing was ubiquitous in ancient themed sims. However there was at least one Egyptian themed sim that was run by an Egyptologist and was set up with a purely educational focus. It had exceptionally accurate information and was laid out like a museum but didn't have an associated role play community. In 2009 Rezzable<sup>387</sup>, a firm specialising in interactive experiences, held an exhibition of the treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb in Second Life<sup>388</sup>. The quality of this build was the most detailed thing I had seen in Second Life yet. The priests visited this exhibition with great enthusiasm. This exhibition inspired me to attempt much more complex objects that I had previously built. I started to make replicas of actual objects from ancient Egypt. One example is Tutankhamun's ecclesiastical chair (see figure 14). I spent over a week researching and then building this chair and it was well received in the community, though it couldn't remain in the world due to the high number of prims required in its construction. Next I made a replica of a censer, then Hapsepsut's Chapelle Rouge, and finally the entire Karnak temple complex in the time of Hapshetsut.



figure 14. Tutankhamun's ecclesiastical chair

My natural proclivity for research had been fully engaged and, with my enthusiasm level set to high, I launched into investigating ancient Egyptian attire. I wanted to know more than just how ancient Egyptian attire looked to me, a twenty first century person of Anglo Celtic ancestry. What did their attire mean to them? Why did they choose to dress as they did? I wanted my understanding to be as real as possible. Our perceptions shape our world. An ancient Egyptian brought into our world might see designer labels as magical sigils. I wanted to try to see through Egyptian eyes.

Any assessment of the actual attire of ancient Egyptians must allow some consideration of the perceptions of the ancient Egyptians regarding colour and

form. Primary among these is the fact that ancient Egypt had what we would describe as a deeply magical world view. They believed that depicting a thing

387 Rezzable, *Rezzable*, <http://rezzable.com/>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

388 Rezzable, *King Tut*, <http://rezzable.com/rezzable-experience/king-tut>. Accessed 09/02/2014.



as one wished it to be would cause the thing to become exactly that<sup>389</sup>. Experimentation in art was not considered a good thing, for to change the rendering of the depiction of an object or person was to risk an actual change to the thing depicted. Changes in style in Egyptian art usually came about when major changes to the society occurred, for example when a new dynasty arose, which circumstance required it to in some way differentiate itself from its predecessor<sup>390</sup>. The most extreme and the most well known example of this is the unprecedented change in style introduced by Akhenaten<sup>391</sup>. Having introduced a new theology that focused on the worship of the Aten, a solar deity, and having moved the capital of Egypt to a new location, Akhenaten was clearly distinguishing himself from all the preceding rulers of Egypt, and so it is no surprise that he should radically change the way he was represented. It was inconceivable that he should not do so, for the magical reason that a thing was not changed unless it was represented to be changed.

Because of this magical world view ancient Egyptian art depicts the world in a highly stylized manner. Usually this stylization was an antiquated one. This is especially true of attire, with people being routinely portrayed as wearing archaic forms of clothing, forms which do not correspond to actual garments found in tombs<sup>392</sup>.

The use of colour was a vital component in this proclivity for idealised representation. The word for colour, *iwen*, also carries the meaning of 'nature', 'being' and 'character'<sup>393</sup>. Considering the Egyptian perception of equating cleanliness with purity, it is then hardly surprising that white was almost invariably the colour used to depict clothing, particularly for priests<sup>394</sup>. This is however a case where the depiction actually matched the reality, for most Egyptian clothing was in fact white, or off white<sup>395</sup>.

I eventually found that most of the information my fellow priests had given was quite correct, though some was bogus. It turns out priests of ancient Egypt did, on the whole, wear plain white linen clothing<sup>396</sup>, remove their body

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389 Wilkinson, R. H., (1999), *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 7.

390 Wilkinson, R. H., (1999), *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 13.

391 Wilkinson, R. H., (1999), *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 51.

392 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 274.

393 Wilkinson, R. H., (1999), *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 104.

394 Wilkinson, R. H., (1999), *Symbol & Magic in Egyptian Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 109.

395 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 278.

396 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 40.

hair<sup>397</sup>, and it also seems that the nearest colour to black that the ancient Egyptians had access to was indigo blue<sup>398</sup>. Some priests did also wear leopard skins<sup>399</sup>, though the wearing of same had nothing to do with being a warrior.

Most priests wore the same basic white linen garment as they had through the whole of Egyptian history<sup>400</sup> and white palm sandals<sup>401</sup> and would only have been recognizably different from non priests by the "archaic sobriety of their garb"<sup>402</sup>. It was only specialists, or those of high rank who had a distinctive item of clothing to mark them out from their fellows<sup>403</sup>. The plain white garment of priests seems to have had some variety of form.

The lowest levels of priests would be indistinguishable from non priests in their wearing of a simple white kilt (see figure 15)<sup>404</sup>. However even slightly higher ranking priests seem to have favored a more archaic form of kilt (see figure 16), that came from chest to mid calf and with a diagonal strap<sup>405</sup>. Ancient Egypt was a land where antiquity was highly regarded<sup>406</sup> and so this garment had status on account of its being archaic. This is reflected in the fact that it was the official dress of the vizier of Thebes in the New Kingdom<sup>407</sup>.

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397 Gee, J. L., (1998), *The Requirements of Ritual Purity in Ancient Egypt*, Ph. D. Dissertation (Unpublished), Yale University, New Haven.

398 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 3, p. 491.

399 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 41.

400 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 40.

401 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 42.

402 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 41.

403 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 41.

404 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 23.

405 Wilkinson, R. H., (2000), *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 91.

406 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 41.

407 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 276.



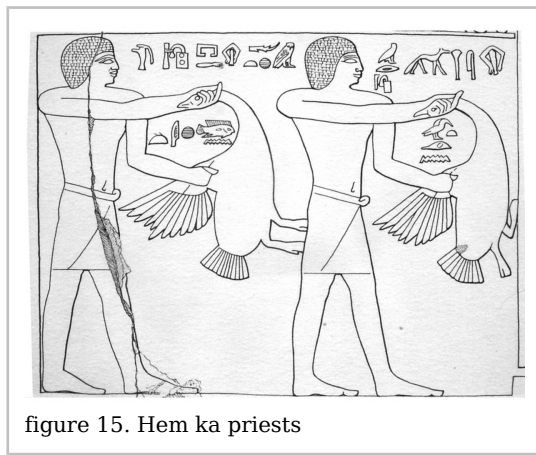


figure 15. Hem ka priests

While priests were required to remove all their body hair they also however clearly wore the ubiquitous wigs (see figure 19)<sup>408</sup>. This stela of Montemhet, fourth prophet of Amun (*hm netjer fed-nu en Amun*)<sup>409</sup> the fourth highest ranking priest at Karnak<sup>410</sup> clearly shows him wearing a wig. But this is where things get interesting as the concept of a priest in ancient Egypt is quite different from the one we have today. In ancient Egypt most priests worked for the temple part time<sup>411</sup>, on a rotating basis<sup>412</sup>. The rest of the time they lived in

the villages, married and had children and held other occupational roles<sup>413</sup>. So, although the image shows Montemhet wearing a wig it doesn't necessarily mean he would wear one when actually undertaking his temple duties.

The meaning of the word for the most basic category of priest, *wab* is 'pure one'<sup>414 415</sup>. While this included a moral understanding of pure, the main aspect of purity was cleanliness<sup>416</sup>. For an ancient Egyptian, cleanliness was definitely next to godliness. Before a priest attended to their duties in the temple they would be required to attend the sacred lake where they would wash and shave their bodies and wash their mouths out with natron<sup>417</sup>. It was this ritual action which marked the symbolic transition from ordinary person to priest<sup>418</sup>. This made me think that perhaps priests wore wigs normally and then removed them before commencing their sacerdotal bathing.

408 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 7.

409 Lichtheim, M., (1980), *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume III: The Late Period*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 30.

410 Dodson, A., Hilton, D., (2004), *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, New York.

411 Wilkinson, R. H., (2000), *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 91.

412 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 18.

413 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 17.

414 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 27.

415 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 36.

416 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 36.

417 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 36.

418 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 18.

Further searching revealed an image of a *sem* priest (see figure 20)<sup>419</sup>, who is wearing a wig while performing his duties. We know he is doing so as in the center left of the image we can see he is holding a censer with a head of a falcon, like the one in figure 17<sup>420</sup>. This seems to indicate that while priests were required to remove all their body hair they still wore wigs, even when performing their temple duties. However I remained confused as many images of priests show them clearly clean shaven. Just to confuse things further, priestesses were invariably shown wearing wigs.

A leopard skin garment was worn by *sem* priests<sup>421 422 423</sup>, for instance figure 18<sup>424</sup> shows Khonirdis, a high official and priest of the seventh century BCE wearing a leopard skin. The *sem* priest was a quite prestigious position, as evidenced by the fact that Khemwaset, a son of Ramses II, put his priestly title of *sem* before his title of king's son<sup>425</sup>. However the wearing of this particular garment had nothing to do with being a warrior, but rather seems to have been a relic of an earlier time when priests had a more shamanistic role<sup>426</sup>. In this respect the leopard skin was considered a badge of office.



figure 16. Ptolemaic priest with shrine

419 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 41.

420 From [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient\\_Egyptian\\_censer.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient_Egyptian_censer.jpg)

421 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 24.

422 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 41.

423 Morgan, M., (2008), *Supernatural Assault in Ancient Egypt: Seth, Renpet & Moon Magick*, Mandrake of Oxford, Oxford, p. 18.

424 Pinch, G., (1994), *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, London, p. 71.

425 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 25.

426 Helck, W., (1984), "Schamane und Zauberer", in Gutbub, A., *Mélanges Adolphe Gutbub*, Institut d'Égyptologie, Montpellier, pp. 103-108.

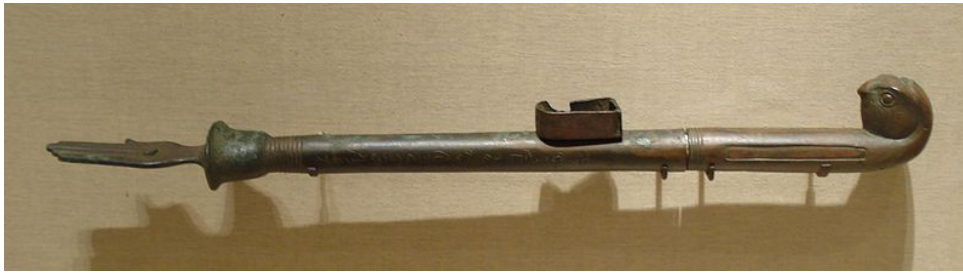


figure 17. Censer

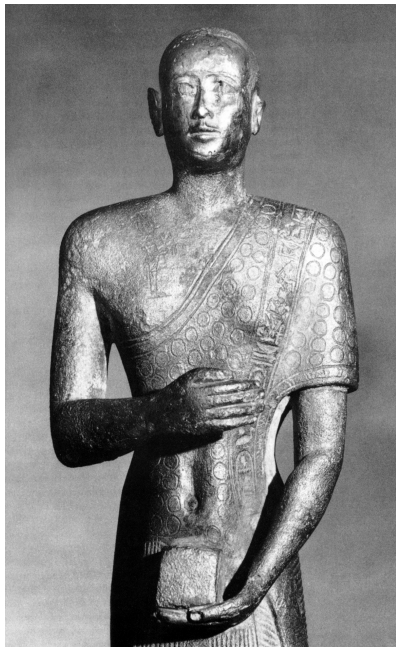


figure 18. Priest wearing a leopard skin



figure 19. Montemhet presenting a stela



figure 20. Sem priest

I was only a humble *hem netjer*, so I went off in search of a plain white outfit for Thutmose. It was to be much more difficult a task than I thought. Mostly people come to Second Life to live a fantasy. They want it to be fun. Because, unlike in most games, in the world one can build anything, within the technical limitations of the client, people do. They give their imaginations free reign and create things that are fun and pretty. But pretty is a very subjective thing, and the range of facility users have with the building tools varies widely, thus results vary. Moreover in the world there can be a profit motive. People can sell their creations for Linden dollars that can be exchanged for meatspace currencies. Some residents build for the fun of it. Some for the profit and all shades of grey in between. Authenticity does not necessarily sell better than a more imaginative approach, and it was the latter that prevailed.

Being by this time familiar with the awfulness of the inworld search, I began my search for clothing on the Second Life web shop Xstreet. Its search was not much better than the inworld search. The results of a search for Egyptian male items are shown in figure 21. Of the twelve items shown on this the first page of the search listing, only three seem to have any connection with anything Egyptian. The first one, while definitely Egyptian in theme, is clearly female clothing. The second is a scary looking Anubis like suit and the ninth is an outfit for an Arabian prince. That this is the result of a failure in the search system is demonstrated by the presence of actual Egyptian themed, male clothing that I was able to find, after much browsing though many, many pages. However this process was still less time consuming than traipsing around many, many sims in the world.

The closest matches to my imagined perfect priest outfit can be seen in figures 22 to 26. I was not immediately struck by the authenticity or attractiveness of any of them. None of them advertise that they specifically set out to depict priestly attire. While all of the outfits contain at least one item of clothing that is completely unlike anything we know of that was worn by ancient Egyptians, they do each include some aspects of ancient Egyptian attire. They also include some attempts at constructing items worn by ancient Egyptians which failed to live up to the reality, perhaps on account of the difficulty of replicating the genuine object due to the limitations of the Second Life building tools. For instance all but one of them, with greater and lesser degrees of success, attempt some variant of the Egyptian collar the *usekh*<sup>427</sup>. This item is very tricky to replicate in the world as one cannot construct a flexible disc shape. Perhaps this is why figures 22, 24 and 26 contain articles worn on the shoulder and/or chest that bear so little resemblance to any known items of ancient Egyptian attire. Perhaps the creator was allowing their imagination free reign, or perhaps some combination of these two reasons.

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427 Wilkinson, A., (1971) *Ancient Egyptian jewellery*, Methuen, London, p. 31.



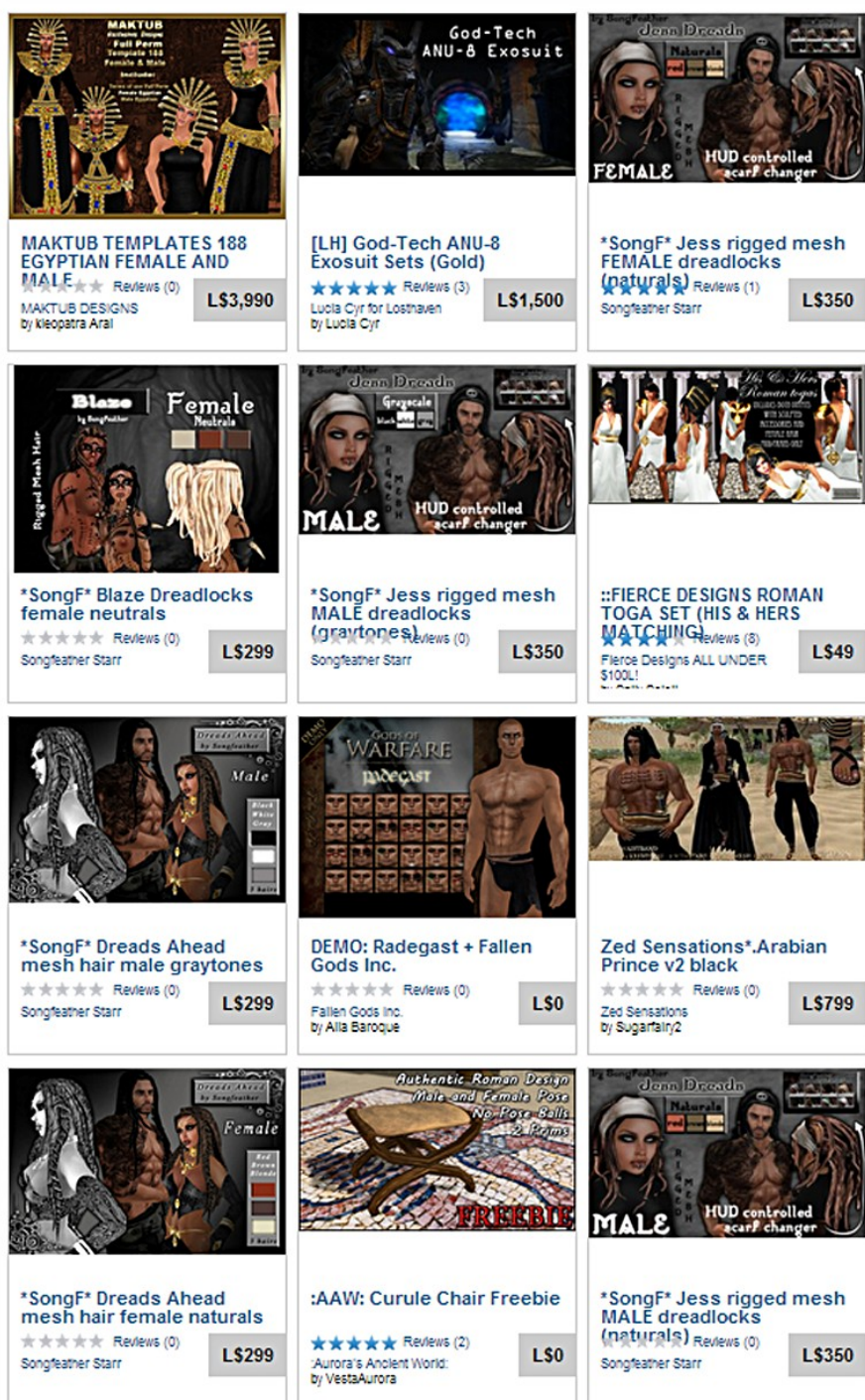


figure 21. Results for search for Egyptian male clothing

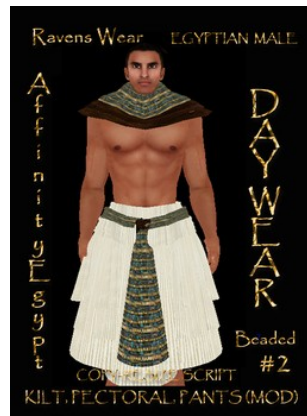


figure 22. Affinity Egyptian



figure 24. Akhu



figure 26. Egyptian white & Gold



figure 23. Thutmosis



figure 25. Amenophis

Three of the five (figures 24, 25 & 26) depict attempts at the *nemes* head covering, also a difficult item to construct with the Second Life building tools. All of these outfits attempt a version of the ubiquitous kilt, though most depict it as much longer than usually worn by most ancient Egyptians. Although all the outfits shown here are in white most of them were available in a range of colours. In fact white was the least popular colour offered. I deduce this from the example of the Akhu outfit (figure 24), which was also offered in black but had just 3 reviews for the white version and 26 for the black. Moreover outfits in white did not predominate: a vast array of extremely bright colours did. This propensity is clearly demonstrated in figure 27 which shows the full range of Egyptian outfits from a single merchant.

Despite most ancient Egyptian clothing being white in colour<sup>428</sup> only one of these outfits is available in white. Generally the outfits conform more to a stereotyped Disney vision of ancient Egypt than the reality.

Priests tended more towards authentic outfits but most others in the community were much less inclined towards such outfits. I decided to go for the most accurate outfit I could find. Eschewing the bright colours that characterized most male outfits in the community, I chose a plain white kilt, no wig and, most atypically of all, no weapons. The closest I could get to a plain white, short, kilt was the kilt from the Akhu outfit, which included a coloured belt. When one buys an outfit one can wear selected components of that outfit. For example I was able to refrain from wearing the poorly rendered, brightly coloured *nemes* which came with Akhu, as well as the brightly coloured chest covering. However the kilt came with the brightly coloured belt attached. Because the vendor of this outfit had chosen to apply restrictive no modify permissions settings I was unable to modify the kilt to either remove the belt or change its colour. I resigned myself to my fate and adopted it as my new look. Being totally unable to find any footwear resembling Egyptian sandals (most people in the community wore Roman sandals as that was all that was available) I decided to go barefoot.

With his new high quality skin and minimalist priestly outfit Thutmose looked good (see figure 28). He also looked real. I attribute this to two things. Firstly, his lack of perfection. Most avatars were idealized representations. They looked as if their humans had set out to make the youngest, most buff, handsome, happiest avatar people in the world, avatars that looked as much as possible like how the person really wanted their meatspace selves to look. In their defense, it is hard to produce an avatar in Second Life that looks old, or worn. The vast majority of avatar skins available are young and fresh and perfect. Secondly I was looking at him a lot. At this time I was spending about a hundred hours a week in the world. Admittedly I spent most of the time looking at the back of his head, as my preferred view when walking around in the world was a view that put my perspective slightly above and behind Thutmose's head.

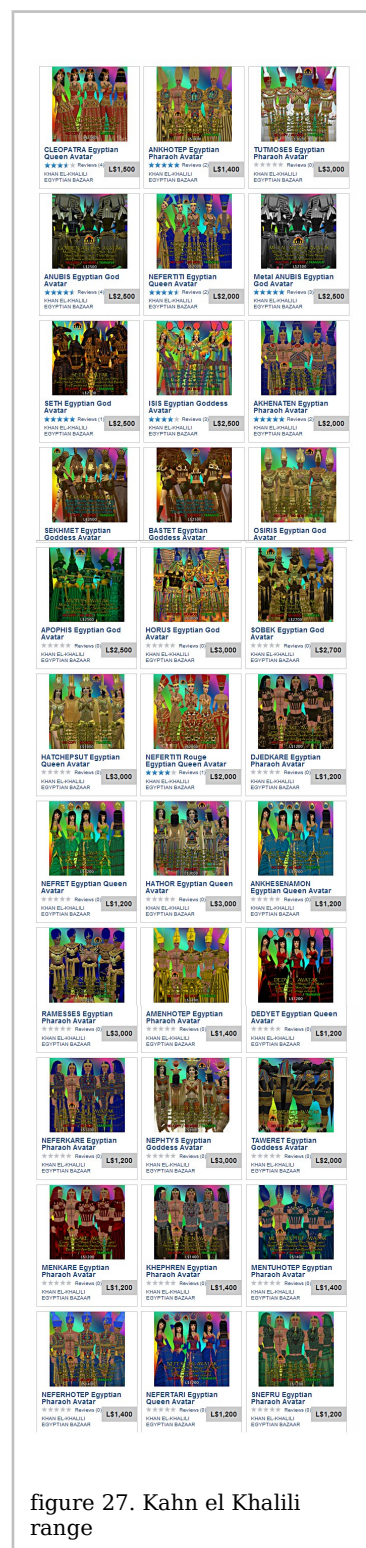


figure 27. Kahn el Khalili range

428 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 278.



The avatar customisation tools do allow one a fair range of latitude in customising the avatar's face, but this is limited to changing the proportions and size of parts of the face. It is the skin that gives the avatar an age specific look. The new skin made him look much older than all the other avatars in the community. I had expended some effort to make Thutmose look grumpy, as this was a trait I wanted to express in the character. Despite this I found I liked him. Grumpy looking and scarred as he was, I felt fondly toward him. He was starting to feel like a part of me. I started to notice that these new alterations made others treat him differently too. People started spontaneously addressing him as "wise one" and most of the priestesses suddenly deferred to him, even though his rank had not changed.

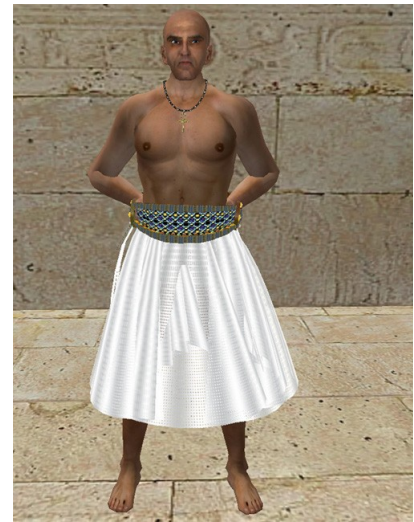


figure 28. Thutmose in his new outfit

Initially Thutmose had walked like a noob, with the stilted gait of the default walking animation. So I had obtained an animation override (AO) for him. Some AOs are just sets of basic animations created using Poser, or similar software but the better ones are made by making motion captures of meatspace humans and converting these into animations. This meant Thutmose now had his own distinctive walking, standing and sitting motions. That he no longer walked with the crude, stiff noob walk made an appreciable difference to his reality status. Without input from me he would shift his position, or scuff his feet as if bored. He was starting to have a life of his own. This life was also starting to affect his status in the community. Those who didn't have AOs for their avatars were socially disadvantaged and one would hate to meet another person using the same AO. It was a social faux pas on the same level as meeting someone wearing the exact same outfit.

I realized that the ancient Egyptians had a point, I had made an image and that action had brought a thing into being. In this case the appearance was the entire thing as Thutmose had no other being than his avatar. Or did he? Thutmose is not me, but neither is he not of me. Some parts of him are me, parts of both the backstage and front stage me. He is also things other than me. He is the self that performs itself back at me, plus the self that is performed from things that do not come from me. Not only the noise in the system, but his AO for example. It is a set of bodily movements that are not in any way derived from those of my meatspace body. They are movements created by making a motion capture of the movements of another person entirely. But they are being performed at me via the medium of a self I see as part of myself, while also having parts that do not overlap my self. The noise in the system sometimes makes the avatar do quite discrete things. Sometimes, due to glitches in the communication with the server, he would walk off, completely out of my control. All I could do was wait until the system established correct communications with my client again. In these times it



was as if he took on a life of his own and I was forced to realise that he was not my willing minion. In this way Thutmose has parts of his self that are entirely not me: the noise in the system plus such things as his AO. I chose these animations for him but they, and the system noise, came from completely outside of my self.

But was the thing I had brought into life a fiction? Perhaps less a fiction than the character with a Muslim mother and Viking father in 300 BCE. But still a not entirely accurate representation of an ancient Egyptian man. Thutmose's skin was caucasian for a start. Much research has been done into what the skin colour of ancient Egyptians was like and while there is still a lack of consensus as to the exact tones of their skin it is highly unlikely that ancient Egyptians were white<sup>429</sup>. I had selected Thutmose's skin for its realism, but it almost certainly isn't any kind of reasonable representation of an accurate ancient Egyptian skin tone. In my defense, high quality darker skins were not available. The maker of Thutmose's skin made an Asian skin, but not any darker toned skins. There were some darker skins available in the world, but I had chosen a skin of a lighter tone than I reasonably believed was representative of ancient Egyptian skin colours because I preferred a higher quality skin over a more accurately coloured one. My nascent connection to Thutmose drove me to make him look as much like a real human as possible. I had chosen one kind of reality over another. But I had done this for the very practical reason that it was not possible to have both at once.

## Residing In The World

Where I had failed at clothing I excelled at building objects. I discovered that I liked to build things. Building things in the world is effected by combining a set of basic shapes to make more complex objects. This system immediately made perfect sense to me and I was building things in my first week in the world. Many users were in awe of this, finding it incredibly hard to grok the building tools. Under Seti's guidance, myself and another priest began a renovation of the temple. We fitted out rooms for priests in the temple. Unless one buys land or rents a residence one often feels adrift in the world. It helps people to integrate into a role play community if they have a place to call home. It was for this reason that we offered new priests temporary free accommodation in the temple. If they decided to join the community they were expected to rent a dwelling. Having one's own space provides one with a space perceived to be private in which to change one's avatar's outfit. This may sound a bit silly to those not used to having an avatar in the world. However the bond that quickly develops between one's self and one's avatar is soon so strong that one is embarrassed if one's avatar is caught changing outfits in public. It is only a perception of privacy however. Walls are not boundaries in the world in the same way they are in meatspace. One can move one's camera (one's view of the world) separately from one's avatar, and see

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429 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, pp. 293-294.

into every space. There are three views of the world one may have. One is as if one is looking out from the avatars eyes, another is as if one is immediately behind and slightly above the avatar, and the third is to move one's camera anywhere around the world, regardless of the avatar's position.

I started to become aware of the factions present in the sims. The most basic delineation was between those who were primarily interested in combat and those that weren't. Most non combatants were priests, but there was also a sizable contingent whose main interest was dressing up, most of these had characters who were nobles. In fact, in both Egyptian communities I studied, the society was incredibly top heavy. Few wanted to role play commoners.

Those interested in combat were the largest group. The combatants formed the Pharaoh's army, who lived in the city of Alexandria, and the Medjay. In ancient Egypt the Medjay were a Nubian people. They were semi nomadic, pastoralists who lived in the south eastern desert regions<sup>430</sup> and were often employed in Egypt as mercenaries and in a role similar to a modern police force<sup>431</sup>. Over time the term lost its ethnic associations and came to be synonymous with 'police'<sup>432</sup>. In Ptolemaic Egypt the Medjay camp was located in the desert fringes of the sims, and they filled the role of the police. Most Medjay avatars were Caucasian in appearance and the style of their encampment was distinctly Arabic.

Many of the people in Ptolemaic Egypt were Goreans, and they brought the particular mode of role play common to Gor, heavy with violence, especially sexual violence, into the sim. Only two of the priests were in this category. This was to lead to massive tension between these two groups. Those who favored combat, especially those heavily into Gor, saw no other solutions to conflicts and disagreements, both in and OOC, than violence. Those not interested in combat would resolve disagreements with clever role play. This would infuriate the combatants, who would then attack the non combatants again.

## Educating The Populace

Virtual worlds have enormous potential for educational use. One of the most important activities of the ancient Egyptian priesthood was the training of the priests. It was a goal of the priests in Ptolemaic Egypt to not only educate the priests but to make information and activities available to all citizens and visitors. We wanted to attract more people to the non combat aspects of the role play. We began to build a library, filled with scrolls, that would make

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430 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 3, p. 29.

431 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 544.

432 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 3, p. 29.

information available to both priests and citizens alike. Anyone visiting the library could click on a scroll and the client would present them with a notecard containing the information in the scroll.

## Notecard - Egyptian Creation Story

All was darkness, and it contained a primeval ocean called Nun.

Then Atum the Creator arose and spat out the elements of moisture, which became his daughter Tefnut, and air, which became his son Shu. These twins then gave birth to Geb and Nut - brother and sister were they. Geb lay over the ocean and Nut arched over him; they were Earth and Sky and their children were Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys.

These divine children in turn married and bore children, who also became Gods and Goddesses of Egypt.

Osiris, the first child of Geb and Nut, married his sister Isis. Their child was Horus.

The jealous Set was husband to Nephthys, yet she bore a son to Osiris, the God Anubis.

Thus came into being the Ennead of Heliopolis, the original nine gods and goddesses of Ancient Egypt:

The God Atum, the Creator, the Sun  
The Goddess Tefnut, Rain  
The God Shu, Wind  
The Goddess Nut, the Sky  
The God Geb, the Earth  
The God Osiris, Death and rebirth  
The Goddess Isis, Love and magic  
The God Set, Chaos and storms  
The Goddess Nephthys, provider of Divine Assistance

Their children in turn:

The God Horus, sky and sun, reflection of his grandmother and great-grandfather  
The God Anubis, God of the Dead, a reflection of his father

And one more great one there was, the God Thoth, holder of Wisdom and Knowledge, he who taught Man to read and write.  
Self-created was he, born by the force of his will.

Source: <http://www.king-tut.org.uk/egyptian-gods/>

Under Seti's leadership the priests began to have regular meetings, at which, as well as general discussion about goings on in the sims, one of the priests would make a presentation on a particular relevant subject. The content of these presentations was added to the scrolls in our library. In the beginning these scrolls contained very basic information indeed. Often they would tell the story of a god, or contain information about Egyptian culture. There was a

wide range of quality in these presentations, but all were encouraged to participate. As time went by however, people's knowledge about Egypt increased and the scrolls contained more complex material.

## Notecard - The Goddess Ma'at

Maat:

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Maat is the Goddess of Truth, Balance, Justice, which comprise the Sacred Order of life. She is the daughter of the Sun God, Ra. Maat is depicted with an ostrich feather in her headband, wearing long wing feathers. The first law of Maat says, "A light heart is a good heart".

Maat's sacred order of life was perpetuated by the goddess, Isis and her husband, Osiris, who taught Maat's principles of peace and harmony to the humans when they began congregating into city-states. Maat is present at the gateway to the afterlife. According to Egyptian tradition, when someone died they entered the 'Hall of the Two Truths'. Only the souls who had lived good lives and had received the proper burial rites could be admitted.

To judge if a soul was worthy, of entering the afterlife, the deceased's heart was placed on one side of the Scales of Truth and the feather of Maat on the other side. If the heart, where the Egyptians believed the soul to dwell, was heavy with misdeeds and outweighed Maat's feather, Ammut (also called Ahemait) ate the soul, dooming it to eternal death. If the heart weighed equal to Maat's feather, the soul earned eternal life in the Duat, the fertile land.

The last role of Ma'at was to help guide Ra as he made his journey across the skies. It was she that determined the course that his boat took across the sky each day. It was sometimes said that she actually traveled in his boat with him, guiding its direction.

Some members of the priesthood were driven by a desire to learn, and to share that knowledge with others. Others were more interested in creating characters and doing role play. There was sometimes tension between these two types of people, as those who engaged in a lot of research put a lot of effort into it and sometimes thought that those who weren't interested in research were taking a free ride. This was especially true when events were organised as the keen researchers would want to make the event as authentic as possible, while the others wanted to shape the events in the way that was the most fun. It was the job of the high priest to balance the tensions between these two groups and try to keep the priesthood a harmonious whole. They did not always succeed. I recall one occasion where I was speaking with another priest who spent a lot of time asking me about what he should wear or what weapons were appropriate. I suggested some books to him that might help and he replied "I will not devote myself to reading books on Egypt for something that is supposed to be fun".

## Notecard - Egypt And The Natural World

### Egypt and the natural world (I)

We Egyptians are keen observers and indeed lovers of nature. Of the 600 ancient pictogrammes that are the basis of the hieroglyphic language, many are drawn from the animal world.

Birds are one of the most popular sources of hieroglyphs with more than 54 entries in the Egyptian Grammar. You see images of them in every inscription and it's often possible to identify the species from the drawing. Here are some examples:

The common Sparrow (*passer domesticus aegyptiacus*) - pronounced Ndjes - is a common element in words meaning "small". The sparrow's rounded tail distinguishes it from other small birds, especially the Swallow or Martin (*Hirundidae*) "Wer" which signifies something "big" or "great".

The Sacred Ibis (*Ibis religiosa*) is a completely word in itself - and signifies Djhwtj/Thoth the god of wisdom, writing and scribes.

However the Crested Ibis (*Ibis comata*) actually makes the sound "Akh" which means one of the parts of the human psyche or spirit. The "Akh" is a special part of the soul that comes into being, often at the death of the body (Khet). It is the transfigured spirit that sometimes comes to live with us in our homes and is the reason we have little domestic shrines to our departed ancestors.

The Jabiru Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*) is used to represent the "Ba", which is the part of our psyche that comes down to us from our ancestors and could be called our "genetic" inheritance.

Incidentally, the other important part of the human psyche is the "Ka" although this is usually represented as two arms extended in an embrace. This part of us is most prominent after the death of our physical bodies. It is also a component of that most important aspect of our belief system - Magick or "He-Ka".

## The Hieroglyph Game

Once I had been in the community for a while I began to understand that the way to engage people in learning activities was to turn them into a game. The first game I designed was an Egyptian Hieroglyphics learning game. It consisted of an Egyptian hieroglyphic to English character transliteration key, an obelisk with hieroglyphic writing on it and many individual cubes, each with a single hieroglyph on them. The cubes could be moved around and lined up to form words. The idea of the game was that one could use the transliteration key to decode the writing on the obelisk and use the blocks to write one's own name with reference to the key. I used the game successfully on many occasions in classes for the priests or in individual lessons with non priestly members of the sim.

However I soon noticed that most people, other than priests, were only interested in it as a guided activity. They wanted me to be there to give them the lesson. In fact they were often quite insistent that I should be there at a given time to provide them an individual lesson. Some were quite rude when I wasn't able to be there on demand. There was a pervasive presumption that such things should be provided gratis. I posit that this is because although Second Life is not a game, it looks like a game. Second Life is similar to games in its interface, environment and method of access. But as a user created world it does not have the things that people take for granted in a game. The most basic of these is interactive experiences. When entering a game world the user is directed along a series of interactive experiences, even before the game starts. The scenario for the game will be explained in some way, utilising methods as varied as text displayed on the screen to full blown cinematics. Then one might be directed through a character selection and customisation process, usually choosing from a set of provided options e.g. The Horde or Alliance factions in World of Warcraft. Then one will be taken to the game play area and given a usually quite specific instruction, as in World of Warcraft where one undertakes a series of quests. In Second Life some of these features are present, for instance there is an avatar customisation process and an orientation to the world, which are both processes which the resident is led through. These processes however are not specific to a particular role play community. There is no way to select an Egyptian avatar for example. One must pick a more general avatar and then customise it to suit the particular role play community one joins. These processes are so similar to game world's processes that they reinforce the expectation that this kind of directed action is the norm. When one arrives in a role play community in the world all this is absent. One must create one's own character from scratch. One must then seek out the appropriate attire for it, often outside of the role play community, though some sims have markets. There may be options to choose from, as in Ptolemaic Egypt where residents could choose to be a priest or a soldier or a noble, but these options are not set out in any formulated way. Rather they are gathered from interaction with other members of the community. As far as entering the role play when one arrives in such a community, one must be completely self directed. The scenarios of the role play are developed on the fly as a result of the interactions between the residents, not scripted in advance and laid out before one in a logical series. It is this dynamic nature that is the appeal of these communities for many. It is as if anything is possible. One doesn't have to grind away at a series of boring low level quests in order to make progress. There is no such thing as leveling up here. One is free to direct the action in myriad ways, as long as one stays within the boundaries of the general scenario, in this case, of ancient Egypt.

Few people in the community were capable of building and because I quickly picked up these skills I was valued as a member of the community. Other authors have noted this phenomenon<sup>433 434</sup>. I made many objects and sold them, both bespoke and generic, and people gladly paid for them. But dollar value resided only in objects not services. One might think that the scarcity of interactive experiences in Second Life would command payment. If there are few interactive experiences on offer surely they would be more sought after and this would result in them commanding a price. However the perception that experiences should be provided as an integral part of the world seems to have trumped this law of supply and demand. After I had built the hieroglyph game people continually asked me to build more interactive activities, as they saw them as things that would attract users to the community. They thought I should build them and then I should be available on demand to provide the experience for the user, even though I had designed the objects to be able to be used without supervision, because they saw the guided experience as more desirable. This kind of role is filled by non player characters in many games, and these surely don't mind standing in the same place and doing the same activity over and over again on demand. I however, was not so inclined.

The hieroglyph game served multiple purposes. Not only was it useful to teach about the hieroglyphs, but the same lesson was able to incorporate historical information relating to the period the sims were set in. In addition to this, information about how to use the Second Life client was conveyed. This produces a rather dense lesson. The Second Life client requires a notoriously high learning curve in order to master and is difficult to use<sup>435</sup> and as a result many residents were overwhelmed by this and often either did not ever learn to use all the features or took a very long time to do so. This meant that every activity had a component of explaining how to do things with the software client to at least one member of the group. Having to do this often had a damaging effect on the immersion into the time period that we all sought. Consequently those who had mastered the interface would prefer to participate in activities where there were no noobs present, which obviously had an impact on recruiting new members to the community. We used the hieroglyph game as a recruitment tool for the priesthood. This enabled us to pass basic information about the scenario of the sim on to prospective members, as well as provide them an engaging experience that might make them interested enough to join the priesthood.

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433 Malaby, T. M., (2009), *Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life*, Cornell University Press, New York, pp. 34-41.

434 Boellstorff, T., (2008), *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 205-211.

435 Sanchez, J., (2009), "Barriers to Student Learning in Second Life", *Library Technology Reports*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 29-34.



## Chat Excerpt - The Hieroglyph Game

Thutmose: come here and we shall start the lesson  
Thutmose: As you know, the god Thoth taught writing to us  
Thutmose: as an echo of the sound which with which the universe was created  
Thutmose: and so that we can store the sacred teachings  
Thutmose: and make the magic which will allow us to enter the D'uat after death and spend eternity with the gods  
Thutmose: On this obelisk you can see the sacred letters  
Thutmose: on three sides there are hieroglyphs  
Thutmose: Do you know what a cartouche is?  
Pepi: yes  
Pepi: small tablet, seal something like that  
Pepi: a couple of characters  
Thutmose: on the fourth side of the obelisk you will see a cartouche  
Thutmose: the cartouche is used to enclose some glyphs to indicate a name  
Thutmose: it is used for names of gods and pharaohs  
Thutmose: this cartouche contains a name  
Thutmose: using the key on the other three sides see if you can decode the name  
Pepi: okay  
Pepi: ptolemais  
Thutmose: You have done well  
Pepi: thank you  
Thutmose: as you know this is the name of our pharaoh  
Thutmose: can you tell me why his name is Ptolemais on this obelisk and not ptolomy  
Pepi: I do now  
Thutmose: :)  
Pepi: I'm not sure on that one  
Thutmose: what is the name of the city of the pharaoh, just over the river  
Pepi: alexandria  
Thutmose: good  
Thutmose: and why does an Egyptian city have this name?  
Pepi: probably something to do with the gods but I'm not sure on that one either  
Thutmose: you know who Alexandria is named after?  
Pepi: don't remember reading about that one  
Pepi: Alexander the great  
Thutmose: there is no shame in not knowing  
Thutmose: there is only shame in not admitting one does not know  
Thutmose: for if one never admits to not knowing then how can the odors of learning be opened to one  
Thutmose: well done  
Thutmose: and was Alexander Egyptian?  
Pepi: roman or Greek I believe  
Thutmose: he was the son of Phillip of Macedon  
Thutmose: and he conquered Egypt  
Thutmose: and was declared a god by the oracle  
Thutmose: but Alexander did not rule long  
Thutmose: he died young  
Thutmose: and his generals split his empire among them  
Thutmose: and the greatest of those generals,  
Thutmose: and possibly Alexander's half brother  
Thutmose: is Ptolemy

Thutmose: who is now Horus manifest as our pharaoh  
Pepi: ohhhhh  
Pepi: okay, understand now  
Pepi: Horus, son of Isis and Osiris  
Thutmose: yes, who the pharaoh is the living image of  
Pepi: right  
Thutmose: so the name is Greek, because the pharaoh is Greek  
Thutmose: you will hear much talk among some of the priests about being ruled by a Greek pharaoh  
Thutmose: some do not like it  
Thutmose: and think only a blood son of Egypt should sit on the throne  
Pepi: I will reserve my opinion until I know more but tend to lean the same way  
Thutmose: Some say that the priests are the true rulers of Egypt  
Pepi: as the keepers of the word, the language and the secrets, possibly true  
Thutmose: you see well  
Thutmose: but to say this is treason  
Thutmose: so you would be well advised to not say such things to or near the pharaoh  
Pepi: I understand  
Pepi: would like to keep my head  
Thutmose: you are wise aspirant  
Pepi: thank you  
Pepi: and you are a great teacher  
Thutmose: From this short lesson I hope you can see how knowledge is power  
Pepi: yes, I can see that  
Thutmose: ok now we shall go to the second part of the lesson  
Pepi: as we interpret the word of the gods, there is much power in our hands  
Thutmose: yes  
Thutmose: now remembering that the universe was created with a sound  
Thutmose: I will ask you now to construct your name from the blocks you see around  
Thutmose: remember this is a holy task  
Thutmose: it is an act of creation  
Thutmose: for if you know the name of a thing you have power over it  
Pepi: yes  
Pepi: I need another N but don't see one  
Pepi: am I missing it  
Pepi: its the saw tooth one  
Pepi: found it  
Thutmose: right behind you  
Thutmose: move the ones you are not using away  
Pepi: I believe that is correct  
Thutmose: ok let me have a look  
Thutmose: ok I will show you how to line them all up exactly.  
Thutmose: ok select the third block and go edit  
Thutmose: then go to the tools menu  
Thutmose: and select snap object to xy grid  
Thutmose: this will line it up exactly with the others  
Pepi: where is the tools menu  
Thutmose: once you are in edit mode it appears at the top near the help menu  
Pepi: I have focus, move, edit, create and land  
Pepi: at the top  
Thutmose: no right at the top of the sl windows. there is file, edit, view, world etc

Pepi: duh, sorry  
Thutmose: no worries  
Pepi: okay, hit it  
Pepi: didn't seem to do anything, did I miss something  
Thutmose: it did  
Pepi: okay it worked  
Thutmose: make your view so you can see more than one side of the block  
Thutmose: do you know how to do that?  
Pepi: I changed my camera view to look downwards  
Pepi: at an angle  
Thutmose: do you know about alt zoom?  
Pepi: I think we did that the other day  
Thutmose: cool  
Thutmose: try control alt zoom  
Pepi: Z?  
Pepi: which is zoom  
Thutmose: move the mouse  
Pepi: ok  
Thutmose: change the lighting back to midday. the sunset will mess with your view  
Pepi: oh thats good, how do you change the lighting, didn't know you could do that  
Thutmose: wolrd/environment settings  
Pepi: wow  
Pepi: didn't know you could change that  
Pepi: I'm hitting the snap object but they don't seem to be moving  
Thutmose: they are moving for me  
Pepi: I don't have tools on my bar anymore  
Thutmose: it only appears when you are in edit mode  
Pepi: edit, tools, snap, what am I missing  
Thutmose: sorry?  
Thutmose: you have to right click the object and then select edit  
Thutmose: and then tools will appear on the top menu  
Thutmose: it used to be there all the time but they just changed it so it only appears in edit mode  
Pepi: I'm hitting edit, then tools, then snap, yep that's what I'm doing, right click, edit, tools, snap but no move  
Thutmose: is the snap to grid option, which is right above the snap to xy, selected?  
Thutmose: it must have an x next to it  
Pepi: okay have checked it, I'll try again  
Thutmose: there is another way to do it.  
Pepi: okay  
Thutmose: right click a block and then look at the object tag  
Pepi: ok  
Thutmose: now see there is a position section?  
Pepi: yes  
Thutmose: with x, y and z labels  
Pepi: right  
Thutmose: click on the block next to the one you are on now  
Thutmose: and you will see that the y number is 49.500  
Thutmose: yes?  
Pepi: right  
Thutmose: if you make those numbers the same the blocks will line up  
Pepi: yes  
Thutmose: understand  
Pepi: okay  
Thutmose: cool  
Thutmose: I love quick learners

Pepi: but if you make the x the same they are top of each other or trying to occupy the same space  
 Thutmose: not if you only change the x value  
 Thutmose: if you make all the x values 49.500 they will all align on the x axis  
 Thutmose: align  
 Thutmose: also the z numbers should all be the same  
 Thutmose: only the y numbers will differ  
 Thutmose: see?  
 Pepi: I see  
 Pepi: but when I change the x to the same they jump on top of each other  
 Thutmose: let me see  
 Thutmose: they aren't actually jumping  
 Thutmose: but I do see the viewer is doing strange things to the edges  
 Thutmose: sometimes the viewer has bad days...  
 Thutmose: anyway  
 Thutmose: it is not necessary to line them up  
 Thutmose: it is just useful practice of aligning objects  
 Pepi: I will work with the snap function  
 Pepi: yes it was  
 Thutmose: come over here aspirant  
 Thutmose: You have passed this test and may now be admitted to the priest hood

In this example of one such lesson it is interesting to note that the conversation begins with us both in character, using the flavour of language and register used for that character, and speaking about things ancient Egyptians would have. However when we start to talk about how to build things in the world we both swap out of our characters and begin to use a more modern idiom. Strictly speaking, according to the rules of the sim, this conversation should have remained in character at all times as it was undertaken in local chat. But how does one talk about the building tools for Second Life as an ancient Egyptian?

One of the great difficulties of trying to help someone in Second Life is the inability to see what the other is looking at<sup>436</sup>. This lack makes the process like giving someone tech support over the phone. In the above dialogue I try to help the student to learn how to line up his blocks. I explain about to him how to use the 'snap object to grid' setting. He tries several times to make it work but he doesn't know if he is looking at the right place to set the option. I have to go through a lengthy process to try to establish where he is looking. When this fails I explain a second way to achieve the same end which he is able to understand and do more quickly. Perhaps my willingness to go through this process is the reason I soon gained a reputation for being fantastically patient with people and for spending a lot of time helping them.

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436 Hindmarsh, J., Fraser, M., Heath, C., Benford, S., Greenhalgh, C., (1998), "Fragmented Interaction: Establishing Mutual Orientation in Virtual Environments", *Proceedings of the 1998 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, pp. 217-226.

I found that for me there was an inverse relationship between how long I had been in the world and how much time I was willing to spend helping noobs. When I first entered the world many people were exceptionally helpful. When I joined the priesthood many of the priests spent a lot of time helping me. I felt I had a responsibility to pass this help along, and for a long time I did so. I answered every question from every noob who asked me. I gave a great many hieroglyph game lessons. I built objects for free for other residents of the sim. I fitted out the temple and spent a lot of time showing new residents around the sims and helping them to learn how to role play. I gave people lessons in how to build things that often went for over an hour. But slowly this began to change. One particular incident comes to mind. A new resident wanted to know how to make pots. At the onset I asked that in return for my showing her how to make pots she should make an offering of a pot each week at the temple. She agreed. I spent two hours showing her how to make pots. I made a demonstration pot and then walked her through the process, providing her with all the textures and sculpties she needed to do so. I gave her a full permissions copy of the demo pot so she would be able to refer to it in future and learn from it. She was a slow learner and made some rather distorted pots with textures that didn't line up. But she was happy with them. She however never made a pot offering to the temple. I reminded her about it a couple of times, but she never did it. She did however put the demonstration pot I had made for her up for sale on the Second Life marketplace, with restrictive permissions that would have prevented others from learning how to make pots by looking at it. This kind of experience, repeated many times, contributed to the decline in my interest in helping noobs. In general though the members of the community spent a great deal of time helping new people and trying to get them up to a level of skill where they could participate in the community activities. Because of the large number of people and the wide range of times zones these people came, from the sim owner had to appoint others to do some of the sim administration tasks. These tasks included dealing with visitors who broke the sim rules, removing prim litter from the sim, and dealing with any technical difficulties the sim might experience. Some people only acted as admins and never, or very rarely, participated in the role play.

Soon after I had finished building the hieroglyph game the Pharaoh came to visit the priests to see how the refit of the temple was coming along. This provided an opportunity to use role play to convey information about the refit of the temple, including the game.

## Chat Excerpt - The Pharaoh Visits The Temple

Khenut: His Majesty, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of the Two Lands, Son of Re: Ptolemy Suter I, the appearance of appearances, given life, forever and ever.  
Nebty-nub whispers to Khenut. "This is the new classroom"  
Udjebten: Em hotep brothers and sisters! \*smiles\*  
Khenut: Our god approaches  
Amon bows  
Paiankh bows  
Horemheb: raises his hand to quiet the beast he rides  
Nebwenet brings her hands together in front of her chest and bows deeply at the waist  
Horemheb: looks around with a keen eye, inspecting all before him  
Thutmose: mighty one allow me to address you  
Horemheb: "We may hear your words"  
seatpilot Ryder observes the goings on outside this place, listens and watches with care  
Thutmose: You see around you in this room the humble beginnings of our new efforts to educate the priesthood that they may serve the gods, your brothers, better  
Thutmose: the scribes do not know the words of the gods and we plan to instruct them here  
Thutmose: also to inform them of the history of your divine forebears  
Thutmose: that they might know the full glory of Egypt's mighty past  
Horemheb: listens and waits  
Thutmose: it is sad but true that there are not many priests in the temples  
IM: Nebty-nub: Tell him about your class as well  
Thutmose: we hope to rectify this by scheduling classes for them to attend regularly  
Thutmose: if I might humbly show you one object we have made to teach the words of the gods?  
Horemheb: "We have gifted all Egypt, all our children, all the world known to us, the wealth of knowledge within our Great Library"  
Amon listens with interest  
Horemheb: "Our Priests, as all who serve us, will find the vast repository of knowledge of great use to their instructions"  
Thutmose: this obelisk will help the priests, and all who care to learn how to write the words of the gods  
Udjebten observes the obelisk for the first time  
Horemheb: "While we teach of all of the Gods, do not mistake the need to teach the words of Maat, for she holds all truths"  
Horemheb: "All of our children are the same to us as our father sees us all"  
Horemheb: "Continue with your learnings Priests." and with that he simply walks off

You can notice in this excerpt that one of the other priests present sent me a message via IM to ask me to tell the Pharaoh something via role play.

## Separatists And Integralists

I had been in the community for about three months when Seti told me he had decided to make me a high priest. More people had been joining the priesthood and he felt that more high priests were needed to help and he especially wanted someone in my time zone to help those who weren't Americans or Europeans. Many people had come and done one ritual or role played for a bit and then left. But a number had been around for enough time that it looked like they might stay so we needed to organize things for them to do. I was in the community for upwards of twelve hours a day. Mostly I stayed in the temple in order to avoid the combat and capture role play. The priesthood had become populated largely with people keen to explore the history, culture and religion of Egypt in detail. We had fitted out the library with a whole series of scrolls with information about Egypt for perusal by the citizens and were holding regular classes about Egyptian culture and religion. We had still had no success at encouraging the combat role players to integrate priests into their role play.

I was in the temple library one day when a priestess I hadn't seen before came in. She came over and, in character, greeted me and introduced herself in a very subservient way. She then asked me if she could show me a mural she had made. She rezzed the mural and asked me to comment on it. I looked at it and saw that it had an image of two gods and one goddess, Osiris, Horus and Isis. Playing the role of a high priest trying to have an educational interaction with a new priestess, I asked her to tell me what she could about the gods in the image. She reluctantly and most apologetically advised me that she only knew the identity of the goddess. She then spent about ten minutes asking for forgiveness and begging me not to beat her. The mark of Gor was clearly upon her.

I asked her then to tell me about Isis and she replied that Isis had instituted reincarnation in Egyptian religion. After further conversation it was clear that she believed that there was some theology particular to the cult of Isis that held with serial, physical reincarnation. I replied that I did not believe this was the case. That Egyptians had believed in one life on Earth, followed by, for those who lived a good life and did the proper funeral rituals, a perfected life in the afterlife, known as *Aaru*, the field of reeds. My corrections produced another round of remarks about her worthlessness and more begging to not be beaten.

Ignoring her protestations of unworthiness and remarks about beating I gently encouraged her to seek out information about the gods depicted on the mural, whose names I told her, and I asked her to come back once she had learned something about them. She continued on with begging not to be beaten and was exceptionally obsequious for some time, until I said I had work to do and suggested she come back when she had found out about the gods on her mural. Thinking little of it, I returned to building items for the temple.



The next time I ran into Seti he advised me that she had come to him and told him that I hated her and had treated her cruelly. She had told him she was going to leave the priesthood and go back to the combat role play where, she claimed, people were much nicer to her. He calmed her and she agreed to remain in the priesthood as long as more focus was put on the priestesses. Seti agreed.

She soon came to see me and asked my permission to rejoin the priesthood. I politely advised her that she didn't need my permission to return, as Seti, as first high priest, had already made her a priestess. Then she somewhat surprisingly asked me to be her teacher in the priesthood. I was unsure what was motivating her so I tried to find this out. The following conversation details our interaction.

## Chat Excerpt - Cleopatra Asks Me To Be Her Teacher

Cleopatra: I have been invited to return to the Priesthood but I wanted to speak to you first  
Thutmose: yes...  
Cleopatra: Is this something you approve of ... or have feelings about?  
Thutmose: why does it matter to you what I think?  
Cleopatra: It matters a great deal since it was our discussions that lead to my resignation  
Thutmose: I still have no idea why...  
Cleopatra: I respect that. However my question is how you feel about my return  
Thutmose: If I don't know why you left how can I comment on your return?  
Cleopatra: Valid ...  
Thutmose: If I don't understand what it was about that conversation that made you leave I may do it again  
Cleopatra: Since I was the one triggered it is up to me ... and not your's to carry  
Thutmose: then I can have no comment on your return  
Thutmose: and I will treat you as I have always done  
Thutmose: and I can accept no responsibility for if I do it, whatever it is, again  
Cleopatra: I think that is fair ... and responsible  
Thutmose: so be it  
Cleopatra: So be it  
Cleopatra: Then I shall return  
Cleopatra: Will you be my teacher, illustrious one?  
Thutmose: Not unless you tell me what it was that caused you to leave  
Thutmose: because there must be trust and honesty between a teacher and their pupil  
Cleopatra: What year is it here in this sim?  
Thutmose: approx 300BCE, within the reign of Ptolemy I soter  
Cleopatra: Indeed  
Thutmose: why do you ask this question?  
Cleopatra: The very year he took power  
Thutmose: actually I believe it was 323BCE that he took power  
Cleopatra: because it was HE that was behind the establishment of ISIS as a primary deity in Egypt  
Thutmose: what has this to do with my question?

Cleopatra: yes  
 Thutmose: that question doesn't have a yes or no answer.  
 Cleopatra: You seemed to know nothing of this  
 Thutmose: what led you to that conclusion?  
 Cleopatra: You told me so ... as well as stating there was no High-Priestess in this RP Sim  
 Thutmose: I most certainly did not say I knew nothing of Isis  
 Cleopatra: Of our HP?  
 Thutmose: obviously I know of the high priestess.  
 Cleopatra: I apologize for reading otherwise  
 Thutmose: I do recall that I told you there was no concept of reincarnation in Egypt, except for the life in the du'at  
 Cleopatra: By 300 bc the cult of Isis was well on its way of establishing a cosmology of reincarnation ...  
 Cleopatra: Cleo herself in 79 bc thought herself the reincarnation of Isis  
 Thutmose: yes, but cleo thought of herself as a goddess  
 Cleopatra: The Goddess showed us her wings that She created herself ... indicating that we could do so as well  
 Thutmose: in Egyptian religion Isis did not create herself  
 Thutmose: she was the daughter of geb and nut  
 Cleopatra: but she manifested her wings herself  
 Cleopatra: They are attached ... not grown  
 Cleopatra: She is the Mistress of Magick  
 Cleopatra: Meaning that She is showing us .. as humans we can do the same  
 Thutmose: this is not Egyptian religion  
 Thutmose: this is something else entirely  
 Cleopatra: It was a new religion that was the excitement on the Mediterranean... and what lead Rome to its destruction  
 Thutmose: I do not take your meaning  
 Cleopatra: There are many sources relating to this  
 Cleopatra: Anyway  
 Cleopatra: It is not the issue here  
 Cleopatra: I was playing a role ... I got triggered by your line of questioning .... and I resigned  
 Cleopatra: Now I seek to resume the RP  
 Thutmose: you still have not told me what it was that I said that made you resign  
 Cleopatra: Your attitude about women and the priestesshood seemed ... obvious.  
 Thutmose: you are inferring meaning I did not insert  
 Cleopatra: Obviously .... we are dealing with lines of text in the middle of the night on the internet  
 Thutmose: indeed, and it is not what I said, it is what you hear  
 Cleopatra: As I said ... I was triggered. I am in the midst of the biggest transformation of my life .... I am going to Egypt in just 5 months  
 Thutmose: and?..  
 Cleopatra: Exactly my point ... you are completely disconnected from the emotional impact of why players come to this sim  
 Thutmose: au contraire - I am well aware of them  
 Thutmose: but you cannot communicate effectively with me  
 Thutmose: I speak plainly and I expect my students to do the same  
 Thutmose: you cannot do this  
 Cleopatra: I disagree ... I can ... I was in a process at the time ... and as a woman sometimes we get lost in our emotions  
 Thutmose: so you were overcome by your emotions  
 Thutmose: and because of this you did not convey your meaning?

Cleopatra: Then, women should not be allowed into the Presthood?  
 Thutmose: you are extrapolating your own state on to all women  
 Cleopatra: No ... only mine  
 Thutmose: only your what?  
 Cleopatra: My emotional context. That sometimes I can become ...  
 triggered  
 Thutmose: your statement that women should not be accepted into the  
 priesthood implies that you think that all women are at some time so  
 overcome by emotion that they cannot communicate effectively  
 Thutmose: this is not a fact  
 Thutmose: in fact women are usually much more adept at communicating  
 than men  
 Cleopatra: {smiling} .... ahhhh .... well PMS is real you know  
 Cleopatra: just stating the facts  
 Cleopatra: Anyway  
 Thutmose: I do not feel that we have sufficient rapport that I can  
 accept you as my student. You should select another teacher.  
 Cleopatra: I respect this  
 Thutmose: I say this for your own good.  
 Cleopatra: Will you accept me as a member of the presthood?  
 Thutmose: it is not up to me to accept or refuse your entry into the  
 priesthood  
 Thutmose: each priest may accept who they please  
 Thutmose: If a high priest will accept you then you shall be a priest  
 Cleopatra: That is not what I asked ... if you will not accept me I will  
 not return  
 Thutmose: that is your choice  
 Cleopatra: No, not as your student, as part of the priesthood  
 Thutmose: as I said, it is not up to me to accept or refuse you  
 Cleopatra: Very well  
 Cleopatra: Then we shall accept our differences  
 Cleopatra: thank you for this discussion  
 Thutmose: go in peace  
 Cleopatra: Blessings Illustrious One  
 Thutmose: may the gods walk with you

I was, to say the least, confused. She had clearly had an unfortunate reaction to our conversation, one she could still not explain to me. It was obvious I had not behaved as she had expected me to, and yet she was now decided that I should be her teacher, that I should accept her as such or she could not remain in the priesthood. It seemed obvious to me that she should seek another high priest to be her teacher and that I should not respond to her threat to leave unless I did as she wished. She also obviously felt that I had some objection to women in the priesthood and continued in her belief in serial reincarnation for ancient Egyptians. So I decided to ask Berenike, the oracle, by rank a high priestess, for her opinion. Was there something I was missing? My conversation with Berenike took place simultaneously with my conversation with Cleopatra.

## Chat Excerpt - Thutmose And The Oracle Consider Gor

Thutmose: Cleopatra is giving me a big D&M  
Berenike: What is D&M?  
Thutmose: :) deep and meaningful..  
Thutmose: usually a bit sarcastic in meaning  
Berenike smiles a slow, wide smile.  
Thutmose: she practically had a nervous breakdown the other day after I told her not to be so obsequious.  
Thutmose: and then she went all "I am so worthless" on me.  
Berenike: shit...I knew Gor dehumanized the men, but wasn't really aware of the damage it was doing to the women.  
Berenike: I hate Gor, I hate Gor, I hate Gor.  
Thutmose: ditto, ditto, ditto  
Thutmose: I told her to hold her head up and be a good example to the people of Egypt  
Thutmose: and she burst into tears.  
Thutmose: I mean ..  
Thutmose: wtf?  
Thutmose: She wants to come back and she wants me as her teacher  
Thutmose: shakes head slowly..  
Thutmose: her interpretation of the conversation that "made her leave" is amazing  
Berenike: I should slap her silly.  
Berenike: She is an intelligent woman.  
Berenike: But the first time I saw her, she was in silks...and behaving in a sub manner.  
Berenike: I think she belongs with Amon and Nebty-nub...she understands them better than she does you.  
Thutmose: yes, so why does she want to pick me?  
Berenike: Either because she thinks she can convert you, or because she really does enjoy learning...and I think it is that latter.  
Thutmose: ROFL  
Thutmose: convert me to what?  
Thutmose: raises an eyebrow  
Berenike: She is a Believer.  
Berenike: She believes in Isis.  
Berenike: The new Isis.  
Thutmose: here she is again trying to tell me by 300BCE the cult of Isis taught reincarnation...  
Berenike: You will only "make" her leave again, you know.  
Thutmose: she seems to be confusing the fact that Isis brought Osiris back to life with human reincarnation.  
Thutmose: wow I am truly a mighty magician!  
Berenike: hmm, ask her if she believes that the Christians teach reincarnation?  
Berenike: Since resurrection is the same.  
Berenike: in both instances.  
Thutmose: I am trying to wrap it up with Cleopatra...  
Thutmose: this is going downhill...  
Thutmose: we are at, paraphrasing, "because she gets too overcome by emotion to communicate this is true of all women and I hate women"... apparently...  
Berenike: Gor strikes again.  
Thutmose: now we are at emotional manipulation...  
Berenike: /grin  
Thutmose: "If you will not accept me as your student I will not return".  
Berenike: I would not accept.

Thutmose: she wants me to tell her she has my permission to come back.  
 Thutmose: I have told her that I do not think we have sufficient rapport for me to be her teacher and that she should select another  
 Berenike: /nod  
 Thutmose: now we are at "Even if I am not your student will you accept me back".  
 Thutmose: I said it is not up to me to accept or refuse you, if a high priest will take you as their student then you shall be in the priesthood.  
 Berenike: Ah, that is the real question.  
 Berenike: Not the priesthood...she is asking if there will be enmity from you.  
 Thutmose: she does not seem to be able to understand that I can be in a state of emotional neutrality about this.  
 Thutmose: she can only do two valued logic  
 Thutmose: either A or B  
 Berenike: Yes.  
 Thutmose: no other options  
 Berenike: She is an English speaker only...has not studied other languages.  
 Berenike: English is an either/or language.  
 Thutmose: this limitation is not inherent in English  
 Thutmose: I don't agree  
 Berenike: /grin  
 Berenike: This will be a delightful exchange of opinion, when you have the time.  
 Thutmose: and for proof I cite the existence of the word 'maybe'  
 Thutmose: sadly I do not have the time now  
 Berenike: /nod  
 Thutmose: I must go and work on a proposal that I must submit this week.  
 Berenike: We will store it for another time.  
 Thutmose: indeed.  
 Thutmose: I do hope the poor girl finds someone she can communicate with.  
 Thutmose: but she sees her own motives in other's words  
 Thutmose: text only communication can accentuate this tendency  
 Berenike: Most do.  
 Berenike nods and grimaces.  
 Berenike: Almost 90% of the female applicants to this sim are Gor players...  
 Thutmose: oh dear  
 Berenike: I don't know if that reflects on the female population of SL or on the sim, or on a grapevine...I suspect the latter.  
 Thutmose: well that explains some of the strange reactions I get from some females here...  
 Berenike: Last week, we had clots of Gor females in here chasing the guys.  
 Berenike: Ahhh, Thutmose, you make me feel like a sophisticate.

In this interaction I am separating my character and my meatspace self. I am being what I shall call a separatist. I am cognizant of and consciously choosing to maintain a separation between my character and my meatspace self. Cleopatra is on the other hand acting as what I shall call an integralist. Her character and her meatspace self are one. Cleopatra seemed unable to separate role play from OOC. I am being so much of a separatist that I don't even conceive that Cleopatra will have an emotional reaction to my

character's actions. Her conversation with me makes clear that her emotions are transferred directly through her role play performance, and that emotions generated by the role play interaction feed back directly and completely into her meatspace self. This is seen most clearly where she says "I was playing a role ... I got triggered by your line of questioning .... and I resigned". She was playing a role during the conversation about the mural and admits that her OOC self was "triggered" by the emotions generated by that role play and this caused her to resign, which she did OOC. Berenike's conversation demonstrates that she understands that Cleopatra is an integralist. Berenike indicates that she sees that Cleopatra's meatspace self has been overcome by the emotions of interacting with my character and is trying to get an assurance that it won't happen again, should she return to the priesthood, when she says "Not the priesthood... she is asking if there will be enmity from you". Berenike sees that Cleopatra is an integralist trying to communicate with a separatist, and that I am being so much of a separatist that I don't understand why this is so hard for Cleopatra.

What was interesting to me was Cleopatra's understanding of my comments about women. Obviously I had failed Gor 101. I had ignored her protestations of worthlessness and any talk of beatings and encouraged her to do more research and go forth and be a good example, but she had somehow understood that I thought women were too emotional to be allowed in the priesthood. My steadfast separatism had been understood by her as a critique of emotionality. Our reality tunnels were clearly not intersecting much at all. My recognition of this, and thus my suggestion that she seek another teacher, had only caused her to embark on another episode of integralist engagement (her threat to leave, an OOC action) if I didn't give her what she asked for, but clearly didn't really want, that being more engagement with a separatist.

She was playing a role within a role within a role. But then she was forgetting that she was playing a role. She was (probably) a meatspace female playing at being a female Gor inclined avatar playing at being an ancient Egyptian female. But then, forgetting these roles, she became upset that my character did not engage with her meatspace self's emotional issues, which she had played out via her character through the script about worthlessness and beating. It was her back stage self coming through the role and causing her to act integrally, so she didn't recognize it. My failure to play the expected reciprocal roles, a meatspace male playing a Gor inclined male avatar playing an ancient Egyptian male, had clearly not fitted in with her expectations, resulting in her taking drastic steps to try to force me back into the role she expected me to be playing. The things she didn't know she didn't know had put her into this position. She didn't know that she was enacting her back stage self in the role play. So she didn't realise that my failure to engage with her role played emotions was the cause of her meatspace self's reaction. She didn't know I was a separatist and she an integralist. Because she saw a male avatar in a community where most males were into Gor she had presumed I was likewise so inclined. She didn't know this wasn't the case. Her character was her meatspace self in Egyptian clothing so she had taken my character for

the same, completely. Her intellectual knowledge that the character is not the person had been subsumed by this role playing short circuit and her preconceptions and perceptions.

Because I haven't met her meatspace self I must allow that she may be a meatspace male with a female avatar. But my sense is she really is a meatspace female. Her integralism is the main reason. She wasn't guarding her meatspace persona at all, her comments about PMS and so on, and her continuing advocacy for females in the priesthood, as we shall see later, all combine to cause me to believe she was a meatspace female. Moreover she just wasn't a convincing enough role player to be a meatspace male with a female avatar. Being an avatar of the opposite gender to one's meatspace self requires careful and relentless role play and an avowed separatist mindset. Traits she had not exhibited.

The separation between avatar and meatspace person was a fine perceptual line, often crossed. The everyday dialogue of denizens of virtual worlds is peppered with references to how anyone could be behind that cute manga chick with the purple hair, death ray tits and jetpack boots currently being chatted up at the bar by the centaur bunny with a devil's tail. One of the most discussed aspects of this phenomenon is gender bending<sup>437</sup>, with about a quarter of users doing so, with men being much more likely to do so than women<sup>438</sup>. It is well known that persons sometimes drive avatars of a different gender to their meatspace one. But the fact is that this awareness totally fails to prevent residents of virtual worlds from treating other's avatars as if they were the person the avatar portrays. While some few are unfazed, most are angry, hurt, sad or betrayed when the discrepancies between the meatspace self and the avatar self are revealed. The discrepancies that everyone was always talking about existing: always talked about, seldom realised. To me it is a lesson that we are not what we appear to be, that all is illusion. While many seem totally incapable of converting these revelations of an avatar's variance from the meatspace person behind them into an understanding of this phenomenon, experiencing a succession of unhappy realisations each time this seemingly obvious situation reveals itself to them, I found it easy to transfer this realisation into the meatspace world. Indeed it caused me to consider who might be driving our meatspace selves. Perhaps it is avatars all the way up. An endless string of self driving other reality self, driving other reality self, and so on ad infinitum.

Some will then ask "which is the real self?" and then it's down the rabbit hole, as there are many reals. As Thomas' theorem says "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"<sup>439</sup>. We choose to believe that certain things are real and others are not. Next we choose to believe our own

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437 Rheingold, H., (2000), *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, pp. 169-172.

438 Lastowka, G., (2010), *Virtual Justice*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 47.

439 Thomas, W. I., Thomas, D. S., (1928), *The Child In America: Behavior Problems and Programs*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, p 572.

propaganda, beginning to think this makes things really real. If we adopt a belief sincerely enough it is real to us. Looks like a duck, walks like a duck, talks like a duck. But it may well be a duck avatar being driven by a large Maori gentleman. Humphrey argues that our perceptions not only form our reality but are responsible for consciousness<sup>440</sup>. This perfectly explicates the reality of the virtual world where things are all appearance and no substance.

Virtual worlds allow us to submerge ourselves in the illusion. In a virtual world no one knows you are a duck. You can even begin to believe you are a duck. You can inhabit a duck avatar community with a whole lot of other people who have decided to live a uniquely anatidae lifestyle. Then one day you find you start to believe you are a duck. You start having duck consciousness. You do duck things. You have visions of being a duck in another life. You find yourself talking to meatspace ducks. Hanging out with them. You start to see reality from the perspective of another being, another order of life to your meatspace self. You become less anthropocentric and feel a new sense of connection to all kinds of other creatures. You have learnt how to see the world from the point of view of another. You realise the universe is an amazing interconnected stream of reality tunnels. What an amazing lesson!

And then one day your spouse screams at you in a fit of virtual widowhood "Why are you wasting your time hanging out with all those duck dressing losers pretending to be a duck?!" And it all comes crashing down. You realise you aren't really a duck. You are a human who has a job and a mortgage, and that really ducks are just things that go well with orange sauce, and how silly you were to believe you grokked ducks. You find yourself wondering how it was that you managed to get so caught up in something that wasn't really real.

This integral conflation of one's character's with one's meatspace self's emotions is certainly more likely to occur in a free form role play scenario than in a game where one's character's actions are more closely scripted. Second Life role play is almost entirely unscripted. The content must be generated by the participants as they go along, off the cuff. Certain rituals might be scripted, but such scripts were also the creation of the role players, not of a game company. To create one's character ex nihilo demands a whole order of magnitude more of one than following explicit missions that have been set out for one, such as happens in games like World of Warcraft. If one is unable to conceive a cogent character, one that has depth, with its own characteristics and qualities, or if one is unable to maintain that character through the huge number of hours of role play that take place in such communities, then one is apt to simply have the avatar be an expression of one's meatspace self, to be an integralist. Certainly this happens to greater and lesser degrees with all role players. We can't help but put something of ourselves into our characters, and we also can't help that they put something back into us. I feel that separatists make better role players. An integralist

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440 Humphrey, N., (1992), *A History of the Mind: Evolution and the Birth of Consciousness*, Simon & Schuster, New York, p. 115.



approach means that one can only ever have one character, a character which is a reflection of the meatspace self. The meatspace self in Egyptian clothing. It also makes role play less fun. If one is an integralist one can only role play scenarios that the meatspace self can cope with. The combatants in the community role played dying in battle innumerable times. If they were unable to insulate their meatspace selves from experiencing the emotions associated with dying they would be having nervous breakdowns in short order. Yet integralists predominated. Clearly they are not experiencing the emotions associated with death each time their character dies in battle. Perhaps this is because an avatar doesn't really die. However most members of the community were constantly experiencing emotional reactions to role play events and then taking OOC revenge for them. Slightings to characters in role play would regularly result in furious OOC conversations. On one occasion a female avatar came to visit the high priest and in character asked him to officiate at her wedding, which she wanted to be held in the temple. When he replied to her, politely and in character, that priests had no role in marriage and that it was not a religious ritual she became embarrassed that she hadn't been aware that this was the case in ancient Egypt and subsequently complained, OOC, to many people how the person playing the high priest was mean as they had evilly refused to participate in her wedding. This phenomenon was much more prevalent in the combatants than it was in priests. Of all the priests only Amon and Cleopatra were integralists, whereas most of the combatants were.

Those of us who were separatists recognized integralists easily and as a result we would avoid role playing with them, motivated as we were by a desire for the role play to be a source of fun, rather than a source of continual grief. Ironically, it was those moments when this separation failed for us who normally maintained it that produced the most engaging role play. For separatists, when a scenario was so engaging that we entered a flow<sup>441</sup> state and became the character, and felt their emotions, it was a triumph. We lauded those able to produce such moments, deluging them with OOC praise. This was in contrast to integralists who, unable to make the separation, deluged others with OOC grief when they felt unpleasant emotions as a result of their character's interactions, or hounded their victims with all kinds of OOC propositions if they experienced pleasurable emotions in role play scenarios.

The key difference is that we separatists were using the role play to explore scenarios and characters we created, while the integralists were being played by the role play.

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441 Csíkszentmihályi M., (1975), *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Horemheb was a separatist who knew most people in the community weren't. He willfully played on this as he found the results entertaining. This was the source of his inconsistency in applying rules. He would make rules, but if he thought it might be fun to ignore them he would. This phenomenon might not be unique to Second Life.

## Pepi's Initiation Ritual

After his lesson with the hieroglyph game Pepi decided to join the priesthood. Seti prepared a ritual for his initiation ceremony. The most difficult part of preparing for the ceremony was organising a time that everyone could be there. Pepi, Amon, Cleopatra and Berenike were in the US, Seti in the UK and Menka and I in Australia, but we eventually settled on a time and day that everyone could be there. We fitted out the temple with new accoutrements for the ritual; a red pot to be smashed during the ritual, a statue of Osiris, flaming torches, purification bath. Next we helped Pepi to find suitable robes.

Seti prepared the script for this ritual based on sources that reflect his religious background. Seti's interest in Egypt had come through his involvement in the Typhonian Ordo Templi Orientis<sup>442</sup>. Like me, he was predisposed to research and, like Cleopatra and myself, to use his time in the world as an expression of his own religious ideas. He tried to get a temple to Set going when he was high priest but there wasn't enough interest from other priests so it never eventuated. Seti says the construction of this *wab* initiation ritual was influenced by Paiankh's *wab* initiation ritual, though the two rituals are quite different. Any further analysis of the similarities is not possible due to Paiankh's desire to not have the text of his ritual published.

This ceremony was prepared in advance and everyone had a copy of the script well before the time of the ritual. However there was also some ad libbing. Present were first high priest Seti, high priests Myself, Amon and Berenike (Berenike was also the oracle), *wab* priest Cleopatra, the new brother Pepi, and a potential initiate, Menka. All but two of the participants had already been through their own initiation, though none of them performed this exact ceremony for their own initiations. Three of those present were Pagans who practiced magic in meatspace, one was an atheist, one was a new age practitioner, and two were agnostic, of which one was the initiate.

The theme of the ritual was Set's murder of his brother Osiris and the latter's descent into the Duat - the underworld, and thence onto *Aaru* - the heavenly paradise. This myth is one of the foundational stories of ancient Egyptian religion. It is the story of two brothers in competition for a throne, Set and Osiris. Set murders Osiris and usurps his throne. Osiris is brought back to life, by his wife Isis, but only for long enough to conceive his heir Horus, who later

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442 A Thelemic magickal order based in the United Kingdom.

avenges his father and becomes king. Festivals to commemorate Osiris' story were held for two thousand years<sup>443</sup> and he was strongly associated with kingship.

The ritual began on the middle level of the temple of Osiris and featured a journey to meet the god in the underworld and then return, which was represented by a procession of the participants from the middle level of the temple to the bottom level and back again. In order to simulate going from the day time into the darkness of the Duat, and back again, the client environment was set to day time, with a special passage into darkness being constructed on the lower level of the temple which simulated entering darkness. Seti and I officiated, he on account of being the first high priest and me because the initiate was my student. In my meatspace world it was midnight while in Egypt it was blazing sunshine.

We gathered at the temple at the appointed time. Everyone wore plain white attire. We tried to set up a group conference to communicate instructions and so on but the group chat functionality in Second Life was unstable at the best of times and on this particular day we weren't able to breathe any life into it at all. Consequently we adopted the protocol of saying OOC things in double parentheses in local chat. This was the normal practice in sims that didn't prohibit OOC chat in local.

I had already been in the world for many hours that day. I had had plenty of time to set up the temple for the ritual and prepare myself. The initiate had been part of the community for some weeks, having been drawn there by an interest in ancient Egyptian culture. He had shown a strong interest in learning about Egypt and had attended a number of our regular priests' classes. He had also been a very keen student of how to build in Second Life and had quickly picked up building skills. He told me he was an American and was retired.

It was time to start the ritual but Seti had not arrived. We waited for twenty minutes but he still hadn't come. Everyone had time constraints so we decided to start without him.

Thutmose: are you ready aspirant?  
Pepi: yes sir  
Thutmose: then follow me  
Thutmose: we stand here today before the gods of the two lands to admit a new priest  
Thutmose: let us all cleans ourselves before we enter the sacred parts of the temple  
Amon washes his feet in the holy waters  
Cleopatra: Washing her feet  
Amon slashes his face and neck

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443 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 57.

Thutmose: may the waters of the temple cleanse up and make us fit to enter the gaze of our gods  
Amon: \*splashes  
Thutmose: (repeat please)  
Berenike splashes water over herself.  
Thutmose: ((oh oh))

At this point visitors to the sim arrived. They were not dressed in Egyptian style and were carrying prohibited weapons that they started to shoot at us. I asked them to leave in IM. They ignored me. They came over to see what was going on and watched us as we continued the ritual. Then they started talking to us in local chat.

Cleopatra: ((sigh))  
Berenike: May the waters of the temple cleanse and make us fit to enter the gaze of our gods.  
Thutmose: ((sorry dealing with the visitors))  
Cleopatra: ((thank you))  
Thutmose: aspirant please wait here, Menka you too  
Thutmose: initiate please come with me  
Pepi: yes sir  
Toula: allitoy io  
Niko: cool  
Toula: xkool  
Thutmose: can you guys please leave the temple  
Thutmose: there are lots of other places to visit  
Lolly: ok  
Niko: hui  
Yani: amonos  
Toula: Â°Â°OMGÂ°Â°  
Lolly: chinga tu madre Thutmose  
Lolly: jajajaja  
Thutmose: normally we'd help you but we are in the middle of something  
Toula: so sensitive  
Niko: sorry to bother u  
Toula: sowie  
Yani: Ha ha ha ha - he he he!!! =D  
Niko: te dije  
Cleopatra: Ok  
Rope Arrow shouts: Bunefer has cut Bunefer's climbing rope.

After we asked them to leave in local chat they shot at us for a while but then they left. Their presence had broken our attention and diminished the immersion, but we returned to the ritual.

Thutmose: child of earth Pepi  
 Thutmose: do you seek admission to the priesthood?  
 Pepi: yes  
 Thutmose: inheritor of a dying world, we call thee to the Living Beauty.  
 Wanderer in the wild darkness, we call thee to the gentle Light! Long  
 hast thou dwelt in the darkness. Quit the night and seek the Day!  
 Thutmose: please all follow me now  
 Bunefer: em hotep  
 Thutmose: em hotep  
 Thutmose: we are in the middle of a ritual please excuse us  
 Bunefer: ok

Here another person who no one has seen before, Bunefer, had come into the temple. She approached and we explained what we were doing a ritual and she left. All present next processed down to the bottom level of the temple and stood before the passage into darkness. Moments later Seti arrived.

Thutmose: Pepi please disrobe  
 Thutmose: Be pure, for pure will, assuaged of purpose and delivered of  
 lust of result, is in every way perfect  
 Thutmose: ((Menka and Berenike please follow behind him a bit))  
 Seti is Online  
 Pepi: homage to thee, O great god, thou Lord of Truth, I have come to  
 thee, my Lord  
 Pepi: I know thee, I know thy name, I know the names of the Two and  
 Forth Gods who live with thee in this Hall of Maati, who keep ward over  
 those who have done evil.  
 Pepi: Who feed upon their blood on the day when the lives of men are  
 reckoned up in the presence of Un-Nefer. In truth I have come to thee. I  
 have brought truth to thee. I have destroyed wickedness for thee.  
 Thutmose: well done  
 Berenike: em hotep, Lord of Seers.  
 Seti: em hotep  
 Thutmose: please cleanse your thoughts as you cleanse your body  
 Thutmose: join us in the inner sanctum where we shall await our new  
 brother's rebirth  
 Amon motions the aspirant to his side  
 Berenike: Hear me, O Gods. I enter with a light heart. Thoth walks  
 beside my ka, and Wadjet has circled my brow.  
 Seti: meditates quietly waiting for candidates return from the  
 underworld

The candidate undressed to signify his death and then undertook more purifying actions. At this point the initiate entered the passage of darkness which symbolizes the entry into the Duat. Once through this passage he found himself in a small room wherein there was a statue of the god Osiris. I entered with him and then directed him to lie down in a sarcophagus which lay before the statue of Osiris. I instructed him to meditate until I return upon his symbolic death, his judgement by the gods and his rebirth into a new life as a priest. The lid of the sarcophagus was closed and he was left in the sarcophagus alone for a few minutes, after which I returned and opened the

sarcophagus and said to him "Child of earth you shall be born again into the light of the gods of the two lands. As Osiris was raised up by Isis you shall be reborn!" The initiate replied "I shall be reborn". He was then led out of the room, through the dark passage, whereupon he again undertook purifying actions and then we returned to the other priests.

Thutmose: Akhom bring forth the red pot  
Amon hands it to you  
Thutmose: Seti please tell us all about the significance of this pot  
Seti: this pot represented the negativity within one  
Seti: and in us all and Egypt  
Seti: its is the enemy in that sense  
Seti: red for the colour of the ancient passions of the god Set  
Seti: the murderer of the good god  
Seti: when we break it - we destroy the power of evil  
Thutmose: I shall fetch the reborn man  
Seti: yes  
Amon smiles  
Seti: Brother Pepi  
Seti: you see this red pot on the ground before  
Seti: you  
Seti: it represents the enemy of the gods  
Seti: and of Egypt  
Seti: walk upon it  
Seti: and crush it Akhenaten  
Seti: trample down the enemies  
Amon: ((in rp of course))  
Seti: as it is done every day in every temple of our land  
Amon sees the pot break into shards  
Seti: now say  
Berenike watches the pot shatter, and the dust of it ground into the stone.  
Seti: As I break the pot, through the strength of Horus in me, I trample the enemy!  
Pepi: As I break the pot, through the strength of Horus in me, I trample the enemy!  
Seti: it is done.  
Amon smiles broadly.  
Seti: looks approvingly on the devoted new priest.  
Amon: welcome brother.  
Thutmose: now we shall hear the negative confession of the candidate.  
Thutmose: You have not sinned against men?  
Pepi: I have not sinned against men.  
Pepi: I have not oppressed (or wronged) [my] kinsfolk.  
Pepi: I have not committed evil in the place of truth.  
Pepi: I have not known worthless men.  
Pepi: I have not committed acts of abomination.  
Pepi: I have not done daily works of supererogation.  
Pepi: I have not caused my name to appear for honours.  
Pepi: I have not domineered over slaves.  
Pepi: I have not thought scorn of the god.  
Pepi: I have not defrauded the poor man of his goods.  
Pepi: I have not done the things which the gods abominate.  
Pepi: I have not caused harm to be done to the slave by his master.  
Pepi: I have caused no man to suffer.  
Pepi: I have allowed no man to go hungry.

Pepi: I have made no man weep.  
 Pepi: I have slain no man.  
 Pepi: I have not given the order for any man to be slain.  
 Pepi: I have not caused pain to the multitude.  
 Pepi: I have not filched the offerings in the temples.  
 Pepi: I have not purloined the cakes of the gods.  
 Pepi: I have not stolen the offerings of the spirits.  
 Pepi: I have had no dealing with the pederast.  
 Pepi: I have not defiled myself in the pure places of the god of my city.  
 Pepi: I have not cheated in measuring of grain.  
 Pepi: I have not filched land or added thereto.  
 Pepi: I have not encroached upon the fields of others.  
 Pepi: I have not added to the weight of the balance.  
 Pepi: I have not cheated with the pointer of the scales.  
 Pepi: I have not taken away the milk from the mouths of the babes.  
 Pepi: I have not driven away the beasts from their pastures.  
 Pepi: I have not netted the geese of the preserves of the gods.  
 Pepi: I have not caught fish with bait of their bodies.  
 Pepi: I have not obstructed water when it should run.  
 Pepi: I have not cut a cutting in a canal of rating water.  
 Pepi: I have not extinguished a flame when it ought to burn.  
 Pepi: I have not abrogated the days of offering the chosen offerings.  
 Pepi: I have not turned off cattle from the property of the gods.  
 Pepi: I have not repulsed the god in his manifestations. I am pure. I am pure. I am pure. I am pure.  
 Seti: it is good  
 Amon: it is good  
 Cleopatra: it is good  
 Thutmose: Your heart is as light as a feather.  
 Thutmose: You are uplifted in our hearts - may the kisses of the stars rain hard upon your body.  
 Thutmose: The highest of the high priests shall now give you your word of power.  
 Seti: I now bestow upon you your word of power.  
 Seti: which is ankhw.  
 Thutmose: Go forth Pepi and keep your sworn promises to the gods.  
 Thutmose: Better yourself. Serve the gods.  
 Seti: life multiplied by the infinite.  
 Seti: go forth and live.  
 Cleopatra: Welcome Priest Pepi.  
 Seti: welcome priest.  
 Amon: Welcome Pepi.  
 Thutmose: can all leave now :)  
 Thutmose: thank you all for coming.  
 Thutmose: let us welcome our new brother.  
 Cleopatra: Congratulations.  
 Berenike: A worthy new man.  
 Menka: Congratulations.  
 Pepi: thank you.  
 Amon smiles.  
 Seti: good work and welcome to our esteemed company  
 Amon: a fitting addition to the priesthood  
 Cleopatra: Indeed  
 Berenike smiles  
 Pepi: thank you  
 Thutmose: Pepi has chosen the god Thoth as his guide  
 Thutmose: and he has chosen to be a scholar and builder in the temple  
 Cleopatra: Ahhh ... well done

Amon: ah....  
 Thutmose: so Thoth is a fine choice  
 Cleopatra: Most fitting  
 Amon: indeed  
 Pepi: yes I believe so  
 Berenike: Yes, Thoth is my mentor, as well.  
 Berenike: mentor, even.  
 Cleopatra: smiles  
 Thutmose: he is the god who speaks most clearly to me as well  
 Pepi: then I have chosen well  
 Amon: were it not for Thoth  
 Amon: Thoth  
 Thutmose: asks the aspirant how was the ceremony Menka?  
 Amon: much would be lost of forgotten  
 Thutmose: indeed  
 Thutmose: for he taught us writing and magic  
 Menka: Very interesting  
 Menka: Thank you for allowing me to be here  
 Thutmose: and the sacred writing  
 Thutmose: we hope you will be inspired to join the priesthood  
 Seti: if you will all excuse me now am called  
 Seti: away  
 Seti: so senebty  
 Thutmose: of course  
 Menka: It may be  
 Thutmose: senebty  
 Menka: senebty  
 Pepi: senebty  
 Cleopatra: Senebty great One  
 Amon: be well Illustrious  
 Berenike: Senebty, Lord of Seers.  
 Cleopatra: we should feast  
 Berenike: Welcome again, Pepi.  
 Thutmose: thank you all for coming  
 Pepi: Yes thank you all  
 Berenike: Yes, a feast is in order... but I must away, as well.  
 Berenike: My apologies, Wab.  
 Thutmose: thank you for your attendance oracle  
 Amon: senebty oracle  
 Berenike: Senebty all.  
 Pepi: senebty oracle  
 Menka: senebty  
 Cleopatra: Senebty Oracle  
 Cleopatra: Well done ...  
 Amon: very well done  
 Seti is Offline  
 Pepi: thank you  
 Thutmose: how was the ceremony Pepi?  
 Amon: and you my brother  
 Pepi: very enlightening  
 Pepi: very thought provoking  
 Thutmose: I hope so  
 Thutmose: excellent  
 Thutmose: that is its purpose  
 Amon smiles  
 Cleopatra: smiles  
 Pepi: it worked well  
 Cleopatra: Well it is late  
 Thutmose: thanks for coming



Cleopatra: I must leave also  
Menka: Senebty  
Thutmose: senetby  
Cleopatra: Senebty all  
Pepi: I understand, thank you for attending  
Pepi: senebty  
Cleopatra: congratulations again

Pepi and I were the only ones who remained after the ritual. We only talked about the ritual a wee bit. He remarked that he found the ritual fun to do and interesting, but he clearly had no desire to examine it further than that. Rather he preferred to ask about a problem he had had building an object and so I told him how to get around the problem. After about an hour of this I left and go to bed. For my own part, while I didn't have the kind of feeling of the sacred that one gets in good meatspace rituals, I enjoyed the ritual. I was disappointed that we had been interrupted, twice, but happy with the way things went overall.

I went into this ritual with the belief that it might be capable of being an effective ritual, that some semblance of the divine might be discernible. I had great confidence in Seti's ability to construct an efficacious ritual and I thought the setting rich enough to be effective. This enthusiasm was somewhat dampened by the fact that I knew that the initiate thought of it only as a role play, which led me to expect a kind of sheep/goat effect<sup>444</sup>. For this reason it could not be the same thing for both of us. Our reality tunnels were divergent. However the thing that really blew this ritual for me was the interruptions. The first one was the most disruptive, as a couple of us had to go away from the ritual to deal with the intruders. Their tone and register were completely at variance with that used among the priests during the ritual, and the swap in and out of ritual space necessary to deal with them was dislocating. Even though the second interruption was relatively minor it was a compound of the first and destroyed for me any hope of it being an effective ritual and of invoking the divine.

There were positive outcomes from the ritual. Pepi was brought into the priests' community and he became an active member. The ritual also helped to generate a sense of community among the high priests. It was seldom that so many of us participated together in activities in the community, apart from the priests' meetings. For me it was a trigger for research. Where did these red pots come from? What did they mean? What kind of ritual were they used in? What was the significance of breaking them? What period did they arise in? What was the negative confession? Doesn't it sound familiar? Is this ritual like an ancient priests' initiation ritual? Did they have initiation rituals? Is Set evil?

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444 Varvoglis, M., (NDP), *The Sheep - Goat Effect*,  
[http://archived.parapsych.org/sheep\\_goat\\_effect.htm](http://archived.parapsych.org/sheep_goat_effect.htm). Accessed 09/02/2014.

While the exact texts of priestly initiation rituals remain unknown to us, we know that in the Ptolemaic period there was a ritual called the induction ritual<sup>445</sup>. This ritual featured purifications and an anointing to signify entrance into the office of priesthood, the same process followed when assuming non sacerdotal offices<sup>446</sup>. The negative confessions or declarations of innocence, which are found in the 125<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Going Forth by Day<sup>447</sup> describe the moral ideal to which Egyptians aspired, as well as forming the basis for judgement in law<sup>448</sup>. While priests were delegated only religious and not legislative functions<sup>449</sup> the latter sprung from the former and so it would not be at all surprising to see the declarations of innocence having a religious as well as a secular role. The declarations are often associated with representations of priestly practice, remarkably similar declarations appearing as they do on temple entrances during the Ptolemaic period.

I have not eaten what is forbidden for a priest, I have cut off no living being's head, I have killed no one, I have not slept with the wife of another, I have touched no sheep's wool etc.<sup>450</sup>

These statements represent purifying statements meant to be recited upon entering the temple and it is not hard to imagine them, or the declarations of innocence, being recited when entering into the priestly office, and indeed Morgan argues that this may have been the case<sup>451</sup>. This important chapter of The Book of Going Forth by day is used by the deceased to "justify themselves and be vindicated (*maa kheru*, true of voice and triumphant) in their quest for immortality by a valid claim of a righteous life on earth"<sup>452</sup>. Similarly a priest states that he was "presented before the god, being an excellent young man"<sup>453</sup>, which means he must have been considered to have abided by the moral ideal revealed in the declarations of innocence. This also lends credence to the suggestion that the declarations of innocence may have formed part of priestly initiations.

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445 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 48.

446 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 48.

447 Faulkner, R. (tr), (1994), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, pp. 115-116.

448 Karenga, M., (2006), *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, University of Sankore Press, Los Angeles, pp. 135-174.

449 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 32.

450 Morgan, M. (2011), "The Heart of Thelema: Morality, Amoralism, and Immorality in Aleister Crowley's Thelemic Cult", *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 174-175.

451 Morgan, M. (2011), "The Heart of Thelema: Morality, Amoralism, and Immorality in Aleister Crowley's Thelemic Cult", *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 174-175.

452 Karenga, M., (2006), *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, University of Sankore Press, Los Angeles, p. 138.

453 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 48.

There is evidence that "presentation in the temple, purification, beholding the deity"<sup>454</sup> were steps in the consecration of priests and all these actions are present in Seti's ritual. Present in Seti's ritual is also the concept of being reborn, which is historically attested from an initiation into the cult of Isis<sup>455</sup>. Another feature of Seti's ritual is the breaking of the red pot. This act, which is of great antiquity, being mentioned in archaic mortuary liturgies from the mastaba tomb period<sup>456</sup>, has as its purpose the infliction of terror on one's enemies<sup>457</sup>. The colour red has a long association with Set, god of confusion and violence, and is well attested from execrations<sup>458</sup>. Seti was familiar with it from Ritner's work and decided to include the breaking of the red pots in the ritual to symbolise the destruction of the darkness and chaos that was often conceptualised by the Egyptians as both the destruction of their enemies and of the god Apep, the serpent who was the god of darkness and chaos, who was slain each night by Set.

I believe it was a combination of, the competency of both Paiankh and Seti in constructing a ritual based both on data that had a firm foundation in practices of the ancient Egyptians and on their experiences as contemporary magical practitioners, along with my entering the ritual having prepared myself as I would for a meatspace ritual, that enabled me to have an experience of sacred space in a virtual world. This will be tested later when I relate to you another ritual experience I had in the world, where the ritual, while having some basis in ancient Egyptian religion, was performed by a person with little meatspace experience as a ritualist and whose intention, I believe, was not to produce an effective ritual but instead to enact a role play for the purpose of entertainment. Whatever the cause, the outcome of this ritual was to convince me of the cromulence of ritual in cyberspace and to leave me enthusiastic to experiment further with this medium as a site for ritual.

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454 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 48.

455 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, pp. 48-49.

456 Ritner, R. K., (2008), *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago, p. 145.

457 Ritner, R. K., (2008), *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago, p. 146.

458 Ritner, R. K., (2008), *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago, pp. 147-148.



## 5. The Opening of the Mouth

In this chapter I am going to explore the contrasts between individual approaches to the greater goal of establishing a fun, authentic role play community. While most people in the community expressed a desire for an authentic experience, each had a different understanding of, and motivation for pursuing, authenticity. Each person's understanding was accompanied by an individual purpose for their presence, a purpose revealed by their actions and their understandings.

I shall reveal these contrasts by examining a ritual that I had no part in constructing or performing, but in which my role was that of interested spectator. By examining this ritual I seek to understand not only the purpose of its creator and realizer (though this is necessarily limited as my reality tunnel is not hers), but to examine my reception of it and explore what this tells me about my participation in the community. This will also allow me to revisit my earlier theme of the unknowing that characterizes life in the world. Not only do we not know who the person behind the avatar is but we don't know what their motivations are. Even if they tell us. Often they don't know. I will show how not knowing is not necessarily a fatal flaw, but rather the doorway to the creation of new meanings by means of remixing, a process that has been going on since the dawn of human history.

The creation of this ritual is an example of what St. John calls remixticism, a process he describes as one "where a desirable experience of universal connectedness relies upon cut ups and disassembly, where the experience of 'unity' and the sublime derives from destruction and breakdowns"<sup>459</sup>. The author of the following ritual has remixed ancient Egyptian texts, inserting her own contemporary Pagan sensibilities and conceptualisations in order to create a new ritual which, while echoing its ancient forebears is a new creation to serve a new purpose. I will show that what has been called reconstructionist Neopaganism does not always have the goal of an exact reproduction, rather it often seeks a new form for a new meaning which, while it draws inspiration from ancient sources, is created through a process of destruction - solve et coagula.

Second Life is not independent and set apart from meatspace. Rather it is interdependent, the same processes that we see in meatspace culture are present in Second Life cultures. People construct meaning in the same way in the world as they do in meatspace. What may appear on the surface to be a poor recreation of an historical milieu is rather a remix produced to create new meaning for new purposes. What I wanted from the world and what my

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<sup>459</sup> St. John, G., (2013), "Aliens Are Us: Cosmic Liminality, Remixticism, and Alienation in Psytrance", *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. 25, No. 2, p. 187.

fellows there wanted was not exactly alike. These differences were responsible for the conflicts and successes we experienced there. Just as they are in meatspace.

## The Girl Temple Thing

Subsequent to my conversation with Cleopatra in which I said she was free to return to the priesthood, but that I did not wish to be her teacher, she returned to Seti and again complained that I was the cornerstone of female oppression in the priesthood. She declared that something would have to be done or she would leave. Seti, keen to encourage participation in the priesthood and foster a sense of inclusiveness decided to make her a high priestess and to agree to her request to set up a separate temple only for women. He had told her she could immediately set up a chapel for women to honor the goddess Isis, inside the temple of Osiris, until a new temple could be built. Berenike and I were somewhat taken aback by this decision as previously it had been agreed at a high priests' meeting that promotion to high priest should be on the basis of demonstrated knowledge and ability. Amon however was totally fine with it. Horemheb rejected the idea to build a new temple immediately as there were no spare prims to build a new temple with and there was already another temple that was hardly being used at all.

I was confounded by Cleopatra's assertions of my misogyny, frankly amazed that a person who had exhibited such serious Gorean tendencies (she had practically begged me to subjugate her when showing me the mural) was now advocating for a female only space. Being as I am not a misogynist, there is evidently a complex problem of not knowing the other that is evident in these assertions, of which I shall speak more later.

Cleopatra immediately set up a chapel to Isis in the part of the temple of Osiris that we usually used for our priests' meetings. This is an interesting echo of ancient Egyptian practice as Isis didn't have a temple exclusively dedicated to her until the thirtieth dynasty, but rather was worshiped in the temples of other deities she was associated with<sup>460</sup>. I found it slightly annoying as it meant we had to find a new space for our meetings. Seti had not notified any of us that this new chapel was going to be set up. We just arrived one day and there it was. Horemheb or Seshemetka must have known about it as Cleopatra would have needed their help to remove the previous contents of the room. Despite our surprise we decided to go along with this new development. I spoke with Cleopatra that day and she told me that this female chapel was just the beginning and that she was looking forward to setting up a temple just for women. She assured me that she had many priestesses keen to join this new temple. As it was the first I had heard of it I asked Berenike if she knew anything about it.

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460 Wilkinson, R. H., (2003), *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 149.

## Chat Excerpt - The Girl Temple Thing

Thutmose: do you know anything of the new high priestesses plan to set up an Isis temple?  
Berenike: The girl temple thing is a project of Cleopatra, who rightly thinks we don't pay much attention to the Goddesses.  
Berenike: But, paying more attention to the goddesses is one thing...separating out a temple at this point is, in my opinion, too soon.  
Berenike: We need more people committed.  
Berenike: Most of the ones who became priestesses are not committed.  
Berenike: But that is just my opinion.  
Berenike: The temple at Abu Simbel is coming along nicely...but needs one or two more goddess type statues...and would suffice for sometime, if they were there...  
Berenike: but the female statues are harder to find.  
Berenike: Nebty-nub is working on that.  
Thutmose: yes, dividing along gender lines, or any lines, makes no sense when there are so few of us.  
Berenike: The lines are being drawn in the sand...between the females who just want to hunt for boyfriends and those who are pushing for more historical dress and behavior.

It had honestly not occurred to me before Berenike's mention of it that people might be in a role play community and have their main purpose be that of finding partners. I knew that some members of the community seemed to be there for the purposes of dressing up and shopping, some for combat and some, like me, for reasons of interest in the topic area. I had encountered sex being role played, but I had no idea at that time of the level of crossover between avatar and meatspace relationships. I was only just becoming aware of the extent of the connection between myself and my avatar, so it is probably not surprising that I had not extended this knowledge to others.

## A Ritual In The Isis Shrine

Cleopatra announced that she would be performing an Opening Of The Mouth ritual. This ritual was used in ancient Egypt to give statues, humans, temples and mummies, the ability to be able to receive the benefits of offerings<sup>461</sup>. That she knew of the existence of this ritual indicated that she had more knowledge of ancient Egyptian religion than had previously seemed to be the case. I decided to attend the ritual. The chapel was fitted out with a giant statue of Isis, some candles and some absolutely not Egyptian textiles. Unlike my initiation ritual I made no meatspace preparations for this ritual. This was probably because I wasn't going to be an active participant in the ritual, and because it was to be a group ritual and that I knew many people who weren't

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461 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 605.

priests would be attending. I didn't believe that the possibility existed that it might be an effective ritual, a possibility I had acknowledged with my initiation ritual. I was treating it only as an inworld event.

People were starting to arrive in preparation for the ritual. In a prior class for priests it had been made clear that only priests could enter the parts of the temple where the cult states were housed and the rituals performed, and that even they must perform ritual ablutions before they could do so. But Cleopatra had invited everyone. All manner of people came in; Egyptians, Romans, and people I couldn't identify. Some people I had never seen before came in. Most of them were Goreans and part of the combat faction. I was surprised to see so many of them there as they had never shown any prior interest in temple activities. No purifying actions were taken, people just walked in and took seats on the cushions provided. There were several priests and priestesses present and there was a lot of private chat among us about how Cleopatra was not adhering to the protocols for admission to the temple. Many soldiers came in with their weapons. Various high priests approached them and asked them not to enter the temple with weapons. They complained, and stood just outside on the porch where they were still close enough to hear and see the ritual rather than remove their weaponry. A few nobles were present, a princess, the general of the army. No Pharaoh. Just as the ritual was beginning a woman in Gorean silks came in. I found myself irritated that Cleopatra was facilitating behaviors that the priesthood as a group had decided were not desirable. It had been agreed at a priests' meeting that Gorean attire was to be prohibited in the temples so I approached the woman and asked her to change her outfit. She instant messaged me to say that she wasn't aware that silks weren't allowed and left. Other priests messaged me to support my action. There had been no advance advice of the order of the ritual so none of us knew what to expect. I noticed that a donation box had appeared in the Isis shrine, which surprised me as Horemheb had always prohibited donation boxes.

After preliminary greetings the ritual got under way.

## Chat Excerpt - The Opening Of The Mouth Ritual

Cleopatra: If you will all take your seats we will get started with our ceremony  
Khasekhemui nods  
Thutmose: where is Cleopatra?  
Cleopatra: I am here brother  
Khasekhemui: Em hotep your highness  
Rekhetre: Em hotep  
Khasekhemui smiles to the princess  
Rekhetre nods slightly to Run  
Cleopatra: Em Hotep everyone ...  
Khasekhemui: Em hotep  
Cleopatra: welcome to the temple of Isis



Rekhetre: Em hotep priestess  
 Serethor: em hotep  
 Khenut: Em hotep  
 Cleopatra: Please... be seated  
 Adjib: Em hotep  
 Cleopatra: Tonight we are invoking the spirit ... the Ka of the Goddess Isis  
 Cleopatra: This ancient ceremony comes to us from the Book of the Dead  
 Thutmose: looks at Per and says we have a code for dress here. Your current attire is not suitable. Please cloth yourself appropriately before coming to the temple.  
 Cleopatra: This ceremony is very powerful  
 Cleopatra: And I would like us all to take a moment to center and close our eyes  
 Rekhetre closes her eyes  
 Nebty-nub closes her eyes  
 Takelot closes his eyes  
 Meritites: closes her eyes  
 Serethor closes her eyes  
 Thutmose watches the room  
 Kawab: closes his eyes  
 Cleopatra: ((Also if you could ... please set your World - Environment settings to Midnight for the full effect))  
 Herneith: closes her eyes  
 Cleopatra: Can everyone see me alright ... I understand there may be some problems with smoke  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Serethor nods  
 Thutmose: you are a cloud  
 Meritites: nods  
 Takelot nods  
 Nebty-nub nods  
 Adjib: nods  
 Cleopatra: Brother Thutmose I believe you are the only one who is seeing me in smoke  
 Cleopatra: smiles  
 Cleopatra: Very well let us begin  
 Cleopatra: Hail Goddess Isis  
 Cleopatra: Mother Goddess  
 Cleopatra: Hear your priestesses and priests  
 Cleopatra: hear us on this dark of the moon  
 Psusennes: please be mindful of the ceremony  
 Cleopatra: Come to us in this sacred ceremony for which we have created for you ..  
 Psusennes smiles and nods in respect  
 Penebui: em hotep  
 Snofru: eh hotep  
 Cleopatra: Come to us and this scared effigy we have crafted  
 Cleopatra: We are to bring forth the ka of Isis tonight ... please give us your attention and your will to give our statue the life of Her spirit the Ka of her being  
 Cleopatra: Great God Ptah open the mouth of this vessel, and unfasten the bindings of this effigy, which are over Her mouth  
 Takelot: Come forth Thoth, you who is equipped with words of power in great abundance, and untie the fetters, even the fetters of the god Set which are over this divine statue's mouth.  
 Takelot: {Sprinkles water to the head of the statue}  
 Cleopatra: {Standing opening her arms to the sky}  
 Cleopatra: And the god Tem shall cast them back at those who would

fetter it with them, and cast them at him. Then shall the god Shu open her mouth, and make an opening into her mouth for the Ka of Isis with the same iron implement with he opened the mouth of the Gods.

Takelot: Goddess Sekhmet, take your seat upon the place by the side of Amt-ur the great wind of heaven

Takelot: {Raising his arms above his head}

Cleopatra: {Reaching up, she touches the mouth of the statue with a strange looking implement}

Takelot: Goddess Sekhmet, take your seat upon the place by the side of Amt-ur the great wind of heaven

Cleopatra: I call to the great Star-goddess Saah, who dwelleth among the Souls of Anu.

Takelot: Goddess Sekhmet, take your seat upon the place by the side of Amt-ur the great wind of heaven

Cleopatra: [Waving her arms skyward]

Takelot: Tem-Khepera who produced himself on the thighs of his divine mother. Those who dwell in Nu have been made wolves, and those who are among the Tchatcha Chiefs have become hyenas.

Takelot: {Comes forward to the statue with an incense burner}

Cleopatra: Behold, I will gather together to myself this charm from the Goddess with whom it is where it is, and it shall come to be, quicker than a greyhound, and swifter than light.

Takelot: Hail, who is bringest the Ferry-Boat of Ra, holder of the course firmly and directly in the north wind as you sail up the river towards the Island of Fire which is in Khert-Neter.

Cleopatra: {Gestures with her right hand to the east}

Takelot: {Circles around the statue with his smoking incense burner}

Cleopatra: Behold, you shall gather together to you this charm from where-so-ever it may be, and from whomsoever it may be, quicker than a greyhound, and swifter than light.

Takelot: The charm made by the transformations of Mut; it fashioned the gods kept them silent; by it Mut gave the warmth of life to the gods.

Takelot: {Bows to the east}

Cleopatra: Behold, these words of power are mine, and they shall come unto me from where-so-ever they may be, or with whom-so-ever they may be, quicker than greyhounds and swifter than light.

Takelot: Let Isis's heart be with us in the House of Hearts. Let Her heart-case be with us in the House of heart-cases. Let Her heart be with us, and let it rest in this sacred statue.

Cleopatra: {As she waves her hands over the statue}

Takelot: Let Isis's heart be with us in the House of Hearts. Let Her heart-case be with us in the House of heart-cases. Let Her heart be with us, and let it rest in this sacred statue.

Takelot: {Let Isis's heart be with us in the House of Hearts. Let Her heart-case be with us in the House of heart-cases. Let Her heart be with us, and let it rest in this sacred statue.

Cleopatra: We shall not eat the cakes of Osiris in the eastern side of the Lake of Flowers, nor have a boat wherein to float down the river, nor a boat to sail up the river to you, nor be able to embark in a boat with you.

Cleopatra: {Sprinkles water of the Nile upon Her breast}

Cleopatra: Let Her mouth be to speak us here and now. Let her legs be that She may walk here and now. Let her arms be here and now, that she may overthrow all foes here and now.

Cleopatra: {Sprinkles water upon Her mouth}

Takelot: Let the two doors of the sky be opened to Her. May Keb, the Erpat of the gods, open his jaws to Her. May he open Her two eyes which are blinded. May he make Her to lift up Her legs in walking which are tied together.

Cleopatra: May Anpu make Her thighs to become vigorous. May the goddess Sekhmet raise Her, and lift Her up. Let Her ascend into heaven, let that which I command be performed in Het-ka-Ptah!

Cleopatra: {sprinkles water over the whole of the statue}

Cleopatra: Goddess, you are master of the heart-case. You are master of your hands and arms. You are master of your legs. You have the power to do that which your KA desireth to do.

Takelot: Goddess Isis, come forth in peace and come forth in peace.

Cleopatra: Great goddess Isis ... come to us in this place we have created for you

Cleopatra: Live her in this place ... as we shall take care of you and worship you

Cleopatra: Bring peace and joy to the people of these Lands

Cleopatra: Bless us all in our daily works and lives

Cleopatra: Give hope and love to all who worship you

Cleopatra: Let your light show through to your servants and children

Cleopatra: We give you now oh great Mother food to nourish and strengthen yourself

Cleopatra: We give you fruit and wine ... bounties of your gardens

Djedefre: Ave

Cleopatra: Great Goddess we see your light shining forth ... alive in this temple!

Cleopatra: Blessings are yours to this land and this temple!

Cleopatra: Great Goddess .... we are honored by your presence!

Cleopatra: We bring you forth into this world great Goddess to teach us and nurture us

Cleopatra: Your children of the Nile

Cleopatra: Em Hotep, Great Goddess

Takelot is Offline

Cleopatra: Welcome The Goddess Isis to this Temple!

Berenike: Em hotep, Great Goddess.

Amon: Em Hotep Goddess

Herneith: Em Hotep great Goddess

Rekhetre: Em Hotep Great Goddess

Thutmose: em hotep great goddess

Cleopatra: Stand everyone and welcome the Goddess

Meritites: Em Hotep Great Goddess

Serethor: Em Hotep great Goddess

Cleopatra: Come greet Her

Adjib: Em Hotep Great Goddess

Cleopatra: There is beer and food available to all

Berenike: Great Goddess, you know my name. My name is Berenike. Em hotep, Isis, Mother of Egypt.

Takelot is Online

Cleopatra: Em Hotep Brother

Amon: Em Hotep Sister

Amon smiles

Takelot: em hotep, my brother

Rekhetre clasps hands and bows down to the Great Goddess

Cleopatra: The beer is in this giant vessel ... enough for all!

Amon: I feel the presence around me

Cleopatra: Smiles

Takelot: As do I

Rekhetre stands and and looks around

Amon: I will pray

Berenike takes a goblet and dips some beer from the urn.

Amon takes a goblet and pours a draught

Rekhetre: Em hotep your holyness

Rekhetre bows slightly

Penebui: em hotep General  
 Osorkon: em hotep all  
 Penebui: General  
 Psusennes: Em Hotep  
 Rekhetre: Congratulations on the welcoming of the great goddess  
 Psusennes: smiles at the scene  
 Takelot: Great Goddess Isis.....thank you for letting us do this ceremony tonight without a hitch  
 Cleopatra: Everyone ... Priest Anubishka has pledged himself to the Goddess as Her servant and guardian  
 Rekhetre: I have brought these roses so that they may be offered to the goddess  
 Cleopatra: Thank you Princess  
 Meritites: Great Goddess Isis, Thank you for bringing me to this beautiful ceremony.  
 Psusennes remains alert, searching the sands for trouble  
 Nebty-nub smiles  
 Cleopatra: grins  
 Nebty-nub: A wonderful ritual sister  
 Osorkon: how has everything been general?  
 Amon places the roses in front of the Goddess  
 Cleopatra: How'd we do sister?  
 Rekhetre: has everyone from the royal army come to give thanks and praise?  
 Nebty-nub: it was perfect  
 Cleopatra: smiles and sighs  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Nebty-nub: A lot of hard work for you but it was well worth it  
 Cleopatra: I feel a presence here of Isis ... and it feels wonderful  
 Nebty-nub: Yes, the goddess is pleased  
 Cleopatra: I believe She is  
 Osorkon: well I will have to go  
 Osorkon: rl  
 Khasekhemui: Senebty commander  
 Nebty-nub: Zebina  
 Osorkon: senebty all  
 Psusennes nods to the soldiers quietly  
 Cleopatra: Brother Akhom ... thank you for believing in me ... and the for making this happen  
 Khasekhemui: Thank you for having us  
 Rekhetre: senebty  
 Amon: Be well soldiers and guests  
 Khasekhemui: Senebty  
 Serethor: senebty

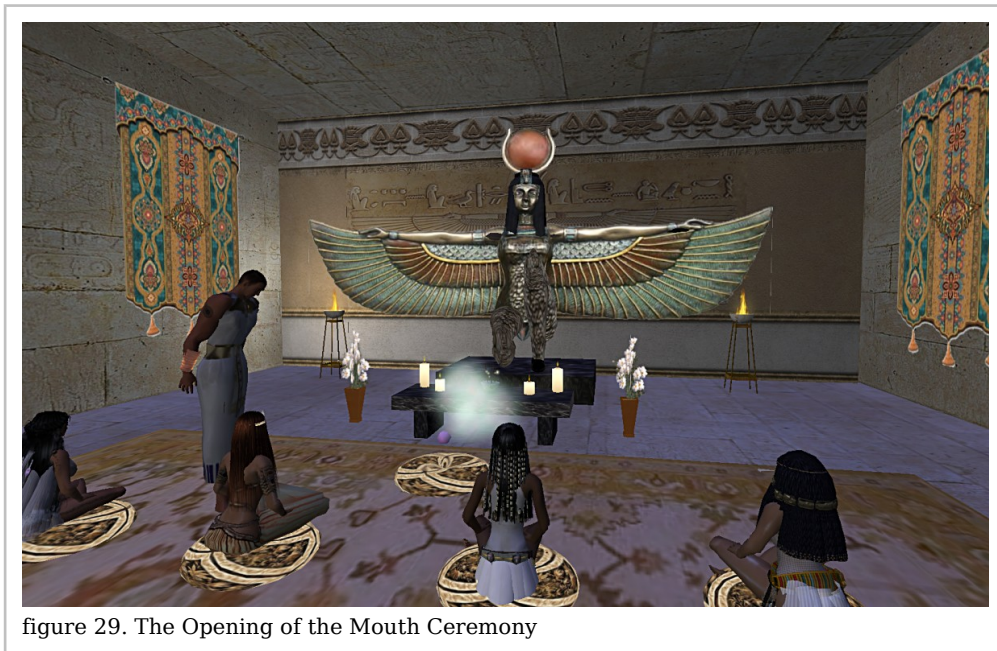


figure 29. The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony

Figure 29 shows the ceremony, and there is a small white cloud immediately before the statue of Isis. This is actually Cleopatra. Second Life uses the cloud as a placeholder for an avatar that has not yet downloaded. This was instituted as previously avatars would be rendered naked until their clothes had downloaded. People found it disconcerting to appear naked and so the cloud was inserted as a placeholder. Sometimes though the cloud never went away. Even after plenty of time had passed and every other thing in the scene had been downloaded one or more avatars would remain resolutely as clouds. Sometimes relogging would remedy this, but sometimes nothing could remove the cloud. I had relogged a couple of times to try to resolve this on this occasion, with no success, and Cleopatra remained a cloud during the entire ritual. Not being able to see her certainly distanced me from engaging with the ritual. This adds a whole level of meaning to statements that we are not all perceiving the world the same way. There are literal ways in which this is true in meatspace. For example I may hold up a pen and ask you what colour it is. I may be expecting you to say red, but you are colour blind and say grey. Prior to having this conversation we would have been blissfully unaware of our perceptual differences.

The ability to discern even something as simple as where someone else is directing attention is a complex process "composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, codes, stores, recalls and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in the everyday spatial environment"<sup>462</sup>. Given the complexity of this single seemingly basic aspect of perception the extent of the problem of shared perception becomes clear. Because our conceptual categories have a perceptual basis<sup>463</sup> our consensus reality is biased towards our most frequent

462 Downs, R. M. (ed), Stea, D. (ed), (1973), *Image and environment: cognitive mapping and spatial behavior*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, p. 9.

463 Rosch E., Mervis C. B., Gray W. D., Johnson D. M., Boyes-Braem P., (1976), "Basic Objects in Natural Categories", *Cognitive Psychology*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 382-439.

perceptions. An example of this bias can be seen in the text of Cleopatra's ritual where I ask where Cleopatra is, because I don't know who the cloud represents, and then tell Cleopatra that she is appearing to me as a cloud. Because I am the only person reporting such a perception she takes little notice of it. Experience in the world has shown me that if many people report a similar perception then more importance will be placed on it. If everyone is seeing avatars as clouds it is probably a software bug, but if only I am seeing an avatar as a cloud it is more likely to be a local network effect, i.e. congestion on my local connection that is making me receive data more slowly.

Another example of the way in which each avatar sees the world differently is the environment settings. At the time of my research the time of day that one sees in the world was purely a client side setting. This means that each person chooses a time of day and the exact environmental appearance, e.g. whether it is a clear day or foggy, the colour of the light, whether it is cloudy or if the sky is clear. This has been changed since the time of my research so that now a sim owner can choose a particular environmental setting as the default for their sim. However each avatar coming to the sim still has to agree to this setting and can choose not to use it and pick one of their own instead. Where Cleopatra says "please set your World - Environment settings to Midnight for the full effect" she is referring to the setting which controls what time of day it appears to be. She is asking everyone to select the default night time setting. This is in effect an invitation to standardise the experience for all present, but there is no way to know if others choose to do so. This is also an example of an OOC remark being made in local chat, which is contrary to the community rules. By selecting this setting Cleopatra is choosing to prioritize aesthetic effect over historical accuracy as for the ancient Egyptians the night was a dangerous time and they would not have chosen to perform such a ritual in the night time hours<sup>464</sup>.

This ritual was comprised entirely of the reading of text with all actions described in text rather than by movements of the avatar. As Cleopatra remained a cloud for me during the entire ritual I wasn't able to tell if she was doing any actions with her avatar. Others present sent me IMs at the time to say that she simply stood there and said the words, allowing her text to describe her actions rather than attempting them with her avatar.

I was most surprised to see that Cleopatra, whose expressed motivation for the Isis shrine was that it was to be a place for women only, had chosen a priest to perform this ritual with her. Takelot was a low level priest who had only recently joined the priesthood, having been initiated by Amon, though he had been in the community for some time as an ardent combatant. He had not participated in any other rituals I had attended and had never attended a priests' meeting or class. He spent most of his time being a soldier in the army of Ra. Because of this I had had minimal interactions with him, but I had

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464 Morgan, M., (2008), *Supernatural Assault in Ancient Egypt: Seth, Renpet & Moon Magick*, Mandrake of Oxford, Oxford, p. 18.

noticed that he had clear Gorean tendencies. I asked Amon about this during the ritual and he told me that Takelot and Cleopatra had become a couple about a week prior. This knowledge cemented in my mind the understanding that this ritual was focused on the Gorean sector of the community. I did wonder why a misogynist subculture would be interested in a female focused event.

Once the ritual was over everyone who wasn't a priest left fairly quickly. It was very late for me so I soon left as well. As I logged off I pondered how this ritual had been different from my initiation ritual. I had perceived no feeling of sacred space and neither had my attention been captured by this ritual. I had remained my meatspace self operating my avatar. Was this because I had gone into this ritual not expecting a real ritual? Or was it because the ritual itself lacked the structure and content necessary to create sacred space? On other occasions I have participated in rituals that I did not expect anything from and I have ended up being surprised at their efficacy, so I don't think my preconceptions are the entire reason, though they certainly contributed. It seems more likely to me that there was not enough of both meaningful content and engaging activity for the ritual to produce a feeling of the sacred for me. Rituals work better when more senses are involved<sup>465</sup>, and this one had had very little involvement of my senses. In my initiation ritual I had had to interact a lot and had several things to do. Moreover the things I had done formed a meaningful series for me and the content also had meaning. It was a journey that I undertook that made sense to me. During this ritual I had stood on the sidelines and done nothing while others said words that didn't form a coherent meaning for me. This particular remix had little resonance for me.

## Egyptian Remixing

As twenty first century persons trying to recreate ancient Egyptian culture we (that is the population of the communities I studied) have more in common with the ancient Egyptians than it would first appear. Otto argues that the Opening of the Mouth ritual is a "confused amalgamation of many different rituals"<sup>466</sup> and that "the cult functionaries who performed it were entirely ignorant of the origins and meanings of the implements and words they employed"<sup>467</sup>. Certainly not all ritualists are equal. In all endeavors of human activity some actors are more conscientious, skilled, learned or motivated than others. Religion in ancient Egypt was a giant machine that permeated the society entirely and employed a large percentage of the population, in one capacity or another. It is inevitable in such a situation that there is a great variety of qualitative difference in the performance of priestly activities. But it seems to me that Otto is judging the priests a bit harshly and that what he has

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465 Bonewits, I., (2003), *Rites of Worship: A Neopagan Approach*, Earth Religions Press, pp. 181-209.

466 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 606.

467 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 606.

noticed is that the Egyptians were doing institutionalized remixing, which is also a major feature of present day culture. We live in a remix culture where "we all expect that we can quote, or incorporate, other people's words into what we write or say, and so we do quote, or incorporate, or remix what others have said"<sup>468</sup>. The ancient Egyptians lived the same thing, albeit limited to the much smaller percentage of the population that was literate.

How was this remixing evident in ancient Egypt? As noted above, Otto describes the Opening of the Mouth as being a remix of earlier rituals each designed for a specific discrete purpose; statue construction, embalming, burial, slaughtering and offering, that were later compounded together<sup>469</sup>. But this wasn't the end of the process. The Opening of the Mouth Otto describes was itself later remixed into the demotic Opening of the Mouth for Breathing. Smith notes the close relationship between these two rituals, describing seven substantial sets of similarities and posits that "...the liturgy for The Opening of the Mouth for Breathing was inspired by the Rite of Opening the Mouth, and probably ultimately based upon it"<sup>470</sup>. This demonstrated chain of remixing stretches from the 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (2613-2494 BCE) when The Opening of the Mouth is first attested<sup>471</sup> through to the appearance in the first century AD<sup>472</sup> of the Opening of the Mouth for Breathing.

This remixing wasn't restricted to only The Opening of the Mouth. The Books of the Dead are likewise the product of a long line of remixing. They are derived from the Coffin Texts, which appeared in the first intermediate period (2181-2055 BCE), which are in turn derived from the Pyramid Texts, which were inscribed on the walls of pyramids in the fifth and sixth dynasties (2494-2181 BCE)<sup>473</sup>. Individual copies of The Book of the Dead were then remixed from the pool of two hundred<sup>474</sup> possible scenes, which were selected and combined appropriately for the situation at hand and according to the preferences of the person for whom the book was intended<sup>475</sup>, in much the same way that the Catholic mass is a set of basic liturgical elements that are changed to meet the needs of the daily festivals or seasons.

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468 Lessig, L., (2008), *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, p. 82, <https://archive.org/details/LawrenceLessigRemix>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

469 Smith, M., (1993), *The Opening of the Mouth for Breathing*, Griffith Institute, Oxford, p. 13.

470 Smith, M., (1993), *The Opening of the Mouth for Breathing*, Griffith Institute, Oxford, p. 16.

471 Smith, M., (1993), *The Opening of the Mouth for Breathing*, Griffith Institute, Oxford, p. 13.

472 Smith, M., (1993), *The Opening of the Mouth for Breathing*, Griffith Institute, Oxford, p. 2.

473 Faulkner, R. (tr), (1994), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, pp. 139-140.

474 Taylor, J. H. (ed), (2010), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Journey Through the Afterlife*, British Museum Press, London, p. 13.

475 Faulkner, R. (tr), (1994), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, p. 193.



The same was true of the daily offering ritual and The Opening of the Mouth ritual<sup>476</sup>.

This process of compilation by remixing is also an accurate description of the composition of Cleopatra's ritual. It is a remix, but with important differences. These differences are; Cleopatra's stated purpose is to invoke the goddess' Ka into the cult statue, for which the Egyptians would have used the daily offering ritual, but she is using a funerary ritual to do this and she is performing the ritual in a setting, and with an audience, that do not match the practice of the Egyptians. This particular remix is certainly at variance from that of the ancient Egyptians, but authenticity is less interesting than the question of what is it doing for Cleopatra? Why is she doing it? I want to answer this question to examine how what she is doing is different to the things I did when I did rituals. In order to answer these questions a close examination of both forms of the ritual, and their specific applications, as well as a description of the variances between the ancient forms and Cleopatra's form will prove useful.

Cleopatra gives the source of the ritual as simply "The Book of the Dead". The exact words she uses in her remix reveal her particular source to be The Papyrus of Ani, a 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty version of the book known to the Egyptians as The Book of Going Forth by Day. This book is commonly known in English as The Book of the Dead<sup>477</sup>. Cleopatra sourced this information from "The Chapter Of Opening The Mouth Of The Osiris Ani" on the Tour Egypt website<sup>478</sup>, the site of a travel company providing information on Egypt as a marketing device.

The Book of the Dead is not one book, but rather the name given to a collection of funerary literature, of which we have hundreds of examples, and which all vary slightly in their contents<sup>479</sup>. While all the extant versions are composed of a collection of scenes, not all versions contain all scenes<sup>480 481</sup>. Each extant copy of The Book of the Dead is a different remix.

The Opening of the Mouth, which is often found included in Books of the Dead, is concerned with the nourishment of the Ka. The human Ka is a non corporeal part of each person that is born with their body but lives on after

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476 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 148.

477 Budge, E. A. W., (1986), *The Book of the Dead*, Arkana, London.

478 Tour Egypt, *Book of the Dead - Mouth of Osiris Ani*, <http://www.touregypt.net/bod53.htm>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

479 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, pp. 193-195.

480 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 148.

481 Otto E., (1960), *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.

the body dies. It is described as the life force (internal Ka) but it is also any representation of an individual (external Ka). The statue of a God is a Ka, but it is their Ba that is induced to enter statues in the daily temple offering ritual<sup>482</sup>. The god's Ba was omnipresent and Teeter describes it as "a free flowing emanation that could be summoned"<sup>483</sup>. Once the Ba is awakened in the statue then the god's Ka can be nourished<sup>484</sup>. Both the human and divine Kas require nourishment that is provided in the form of food and drink<sup>485</sup>.

There are two cases in which The Opening of the Mouth could be performed on a statue. Each case has a different purpose. The first case is for use in the sculptor's workshop when a statue was first manufactured. This was performed in order to cause the statue to be a fit thing for cult use, which Lorton describes as a process of "quickenning the statue"<sup>486</sup>, while Roth describes it as "activating the statue"<sup>487</sup>. The second case is when it is performed in the tomb when a statue is used as a representative of the mummy, in which case it was performed to enable the deceased's Ka to receive the benefit of offerings via the statue<sup>488 489</sup>.

The funereal form of the Opening of the Mouth was performed in the tomb and there would have been a number of priests and family members present<sup>490</sup>. The workshop form of The Opening of the Mouth was performed in the workshop of the sculptor where there would be at least two priests and the sculptor<sup>491</sup>. The daily ritual was performed in the holiest and most central part of the temple where the god's statue lived and only the most high ranking

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482 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 43-44.

483 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 43-44.

484 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 183.

485 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 45.

486 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 130.

487 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, pp. 605-609.

488 Faulkner, R. (tr), (1994), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, p. 162.

489 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 150.

490 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 139.

491 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 149.

priests were allowed to enter<sup>492</sup>. Cleopatra's form was performed in an outer part of the temple with several priests as well as non priestly members of the community present.

Roth argues that The Opening of the Mouth ritual has its origins as a funerary ritual in the Old Kingdom, which was the source from which the variant of the ritual used to animate statues developed<sup>493</sup> in the fourth dynasty<sup>494</sup>. Otto however posits that the use of the ritual for preparing statues in the sculptor's workshop was its earliest use<sup>495</sup>. The only copies of The Opening of the Mouth ritual that are extant are the funereal forms found in Books of the Dead<sup>496</sup>.

Otto, who identifies a maximum of seventy five scenes of which a New Kingdom book could be composed<sup>497</sup>, argues that there would have been more than one form, which is to say different remixes, of the Opening of the Mouth and that the different forms would have been used in different contexts<sup>498</sup>, i.e. use in the tomb or use in the sculptors workshop immediately after the statue's construction. Lorton argues that there was one form but that there may have been differences in the wording and personnel employed<sup>499</sup>. Lorton admits the two applications have much in common and suggests they may have been a "shared solution" to the problem of animating an inert object<sup>500</sup>. I think that both of these suggestions have merit. That, like The Book of the Dead, the funereal form and the workshop form of the Opening of the Mouth would differ by being a different remix. Many scenes that appear in the funereal form may well appear in the workshop remix, but other scenes specific to the purposes of the workshop ritual would appear in only that remix.

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492 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 47-48.

493 Roth, A. M., (1993), "Fingers, Stars, and the 'Opening of the Mouth': The Nature and Function of the *nṯrwj*-Blades", *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, pp. 57-79.

494 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 606.

495 Otto E., (1960), *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.

496 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 149.

497 Otto E., (1960), *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.

498 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 151.

499 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 151.

500 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 150.

The scenes used in Books of the Dead varied over time<sup>501</sup> and by the time of the Ptolemys, the time in which the sims were set, the ritual had had many scenes added to it, with two hundred now known to us<sup>502</sup>. However there is no agreement as to exactly what comprises a complete Book of the Dead, with many very short versions having been found, some omitting scenes that seem crucial<sup>503</sup>. It has been suggested that scene 64 is complete enough to stand alone<sup>504</sup>. Cleopatra's remix does not contain scene 64, but it does contain extracts from the The Opening of the Mouth scenes found in Books of the Dead, which are the versions of the former used to ensure the reception of offerings for the deceased's Ka. At one point Cleopatra says;

Great God Ptah open the mouth of this vessel, and unfasten the bindings of this effigy, which are over Her mouth.

and at another;

Come forth Thoth, you who is equipped with words of power in great abundance, and untie the fetters, even the fetters of the god Set which are over this divine statue's mouth.

Both of these phrases are paraphrases of "The Scene of the Opening of the Mouth of the Osiris Ani" in the Papyrus of Ani. Ani, the subject of the text, is a deceased person, and the moniker Osiris is applied before his name in order to indicate that, like Osiris, he is about to be reborn into a new life. In the first section Cleopatra is asking Ptah, a creator god, to release Isis from the bindings of her mummy. But Isis was never mummified. In the case of humans, divinity is realised through the Ka. The Ka hieroglyph holds the serekh (the precursor of the cartouche) with the king's Horus name, one of a number of names a king would have and which identified him as a son of Horus. Thus the royal Ka is related to the presence of Horus in the king. This portrays the dual nature of the king, who had both divine and mortal components<sup>505</sup>. A goddess however has no human components.

Cleopatra then goes on to combine other scenes from the Book of the Dead into her ritual, including this text from The Chapter Of Bringing Words Of Power To The Osiris Ani;

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501 Budge, E. A. W., (1909), *The Book of Opening the Mouth*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co. Ltd., London, Vol. 1, p. 6.

502 Taylor, J. H. (ed), (2010), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Journey Through the Afterlife*, British Museum Press, London, p. 13.

503 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 195.

504 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 1, p. 195.

505 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 215.

Tem-Khepera who produced himself on the thighs of his divine mother. Those who dwell in Nu have been made wolves, and those who are among the Tchatcha Chiefs have become hyenas.

And this text from another scene of The Book of the Dead, The Chapter Of Giving A Heart To The Osiris Ani In Khert-Neter;

Let Isis's (sic) heart be with us in the House of Hearts. Let Her heart-case be with us in the House of heart-cases. Let Her heart be with us, and let it rest in this sacred statue.

The scenes Cleopatra has chosen are all specifically funereal in content rather than her stated goal of invoking the goddesses' Ka in the temple. She has amended the text to replace the words "and unfasten the bindings of this effigy, which are over my mouth", which the deceased speaks in the mortuary form, with "and unfasten the bindings of this effigy, which are over Her mouth", to refer to the statue's mouth, and has also replaced "even the fetters of the god Set which are over my mouth" with "even the fetters of the god Set which are over this divine statue's mouth". Are these changes the kind an ancient Egyptian would have made? It seems to me the answer must be no, as they would not have used a mortuary form for a daily offering purpose. This remix would not be to their taste.

Isis is a special case in relation to The Opening of the Mouth. The Opening of the Mouth contains funerary and mummification spells which are based on descriptions of Isis' actions in the Osiris story<sup>506</sup>. It was she, with her sister Nephthys, who attended to Osiris's prototypical mummification<sup>507</sup>. Cleopatra is employing a remix that is based on information given to humans by a goddess in order that humans may be revived after their mortal death but she is using it in order to call the Ka of the goddess into a statue. Because Cleopatra's stated purpose is to invoke the goddess' Ka and because she is performing this ritual in the temple, rather than in the sculptor's workshop, I conclude that Cleopatra should have been performing the daily offering ritual rather than the Opening of the Mouth if she was to replicate ancient Egyptian practise.

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506 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 188.

507 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 189.

There are no extant versions of The Opening of the Mouth as used to activate statues in the sculptor's workshop<sup>508</sup> so I cannot make a detailed textual comparison. However Lorton<sup>509</sup>, noting the commonalities of content between the daily offering ritual in the temple and the Opening of the Mouth, makes a comparison between these two in order to explicate the differences between the two version of The Opening of the Mouth. He points out that these two rituals had quite different purposes. The Opening of the Mouth was used on a statue immediately after its manufacture to activate it while the daily temple ritual was used to invoke the god's Ba into the statue.

The daily offering ritual follows a similar form to the Opening of the Mouth, it begins with purifications of the priest, then incense is burned followed by the unsealing of the god's shrine and the removal of the statue from same<sup>510</sup>. Once removed the statue is cleansed, offerings of cloth are made and cosmetics are applied along with jewellery, scepters and the appropriate headdress<sup>511</sup>. Once this preparation had been completed the statue was offered food and drink and after the god was considered to have received the benefit of these offerings they were removed and the god was prepared to return to sleep<sup>512</sup>.

It is important to note that one of the purposes of incense in the daily offering ritual was to effect the daily awakening of the statue. Wise explains how incense was emblematic of the power that brought life, and gives the example of Seti I thurifying statues of Horus and Osiris in a way that makes it clear that he "bestows life on the images through his own breath"<sup>513</sup>. Wise further points out that Egyptians had an understanding of their gods as corpses constantly needing to be resurrected<sup>514</sup>. Such ideas support the suggestion that we can imagine the Opening of the Mouth as being very similar to the daily temple ritual. Lorton disagrees on the basis that while the latter parts of both the daily ritual and the Opening of the Mouth have a "significant amount of shared material"<sup>515</sup> the earlier portions contain little. The early parts of the daily temple ritual are concerned with the awakening of the god and are quite

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508 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 149.

509 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., pp. 148-151.

510 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 47-48.

511 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 47-48.

512 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 47-48.

513 Wise, E., (2009), "An 'Odor of Sanctity': The Iconography, Magic and Ritual of Egyptian Incense", *Studia Antiqua*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 72.

514 Wise, E., (2009), "An 'Odor of Sanctity': The Iconography, Magic and Ritual of Egyptian Incense", *Studia Antiqua*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 72.

515 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., p. 153.

distinct as to the theological meaning of this awakening<sup>516</sup> so it is not surprising that this material is not included in either a funereal ritual for a human nor the initial activation of a statue, as the rebirth of the human into the next life, the activation of a statue in the first instance and the awakening of the god each day are theologically quite different things. However given the propensity of the Egyptians to remix from a pool of data, and the absence of an extant workshop form of the Opening of the Mouth, we can only speculate as to whether or not the workshop form of The Opening of the Mouth was a remix that included references to awakening the god, bringing the god's Ba into the statue, and references found in the later sections of the funereal Opening of the Mouth related to the animation of the Ka.

Like most Ancient Egyptian rituals, both the Books of the Dead and the Daily Offering Ritual generally begin with a great many purifying actions, lustrations and thurifications, and praises for the deity in question<sup>517 518 519</sup>. Both the Book of the Dead and the Daily Offering Ritual contain a large number of serial offerings. Indeed they are a central feature of both rituals, for example in the Papyrus of Ani, from which Cleopatra has taken her excerpts, the very first vignette shows Ani giving praise and making food offerings<sup>520</sup>. There is one incidence of a single word of praise to Isis in Cleopatra's ritual, near the beginning she says "Hail Goddess Isis". Cleopatra does sprinkle water on the statue three times in her ritual, but these actions are not in context as they are not associated with any words of purification, as would have been the case in ancient Egypt. There is an offering of fruit and wine towards the end of the ritual, but the purpose is not that of the ancient Egyptians. Cleopatra states her purpose here as "we bring you forth into this world great Goddess to teach us and nurture us", whereas for the ancient Egyptians the purpose of the ritual was to nourish the goddess.

## A Remix Remixed

Apart from these theological considerations, Cleopatra's setting and audience do not match what we know of Egyptian practice. I had not been alone in being annoyed at her deviance from the established norms of the priesthood in the world, so I guess I was not surprised to find she was also at deviance from established Egyptian practice. Initially I felt justified in my appraisal of her by this deviance. But the more I thought about it the more I came to see her actions as not a failure to recreate historical practice, but rather as a new

516 Lorton, D., (1999), "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in Dick, M. B. (ed), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind., pp. 153-154.

517 Budge, E. A. W., (1909), *The Book of Opening the Mouth*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co. Ltd., London, Vol. 1.

518 Faulkner, R. (tr), (1994), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco.

519 Teeter, E., (2011), *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 47-48.

520 Faulkner, R. (tr), (1994), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, plate 1.

creation in itself. Not a creation to match my expectations, nor that of the ancient Egyptians, but a creation to suit her own reality tunnel. To put it in theological terms, she was serving a different god than I. Once I realised this I was surprised at my initial feeling. There I was, a panentheist, having a monotheistic reaction. I was reacting as if there was one right way to proceed. One correct understanding. This realisation parallels my own religious journey. Raised a Catholic I had become a panentheist after realising that everyone has their own truth. This feeling of justification made me aware of my hypocrisy. I had wanted there to be one right way. My way. I resolved to learn more about ancient Egyptian religion to see if I could gain a greater understanding of how they dealt with many understandings of divinity.

Although we can not be sure if this particular remix would have meaning for the ancient Egyptians, we can be sure it had some meaning to Cleopatra. She exclaimed during the ritual that she felt the presence of the goddess in the temple. Whether this was a separatist or an integralist expression, it was an expression of a finding of meaning. Did she mean to actually awaken a statue in the same way the ancient Egyptians did? Did she mean to enact a role play of this happening with no actual expectation that the statue would be truly awakened? Or was the meaning entirely unrelated to the religious meaning of the ritual? Perhaps it was that the ritual had meaning for her in its social sense, i.e. that she and Takelot had been able to undertake an activity together, or perhaps that a group of people in the community had been brought together to share an experience, and that the exact nature of the event was less important than the fact of bringing these people together. Whichever of these it was, these actions had meaning for her.

But is it real meaning? Do Cleopatra's actions represent a failure to accurately recreate an ancient ritual, a democratization of knowledge leading to a remix which generates new meanings, or a social exchange where the content is irrelevant? I do not know her exact intention, but whatever it was Cleopatra was in fact acting as the ancient Egyptians did. She was remixing old forms to make a new meaning. She was a twenty first century echo of the cult functionaries of ancient Egypt who Otto described as "entirely ignorant of the origins and meanings of the implements and words they employed"<sup>521</sup>. Perhaps her motives share something with theirs? As we will never know their motivations, we are only guessing. One thing is for sure, she was not worshiping the exact same Isis the ancient Egyptians did. Her Isis has a cult that features metempsychosis, whereas the ancient Egyptians had only one rebirth and that was into another world. Her Isis cult is a feminist one. The ancient Egyptian one was not. Her understanding of calling the goddess into the statue is not the same as the ancient Egyptians had. But it is an understanding and it is hers. This is exactly what one would expect to find in an age when the centralized production of information is over and individuals are accustomed to creating remixes to create new individual meanings<sup>522</sup>.

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521 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 606.

522 Reuveni, E. (2007), "Authorship in the Age of the Conducer", *Copyright Society of the USA*, Vol. 54, Issue 218, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1113491>. Accessed 31/01/2014.



Cleopatra, who is a member of a reconstructionist Isis cult in meatspace, is a contemporary Pagan remixing older sources to form her new understanding, which is a trend seen throughout contemporary Paganism. Hutton<sup>523</sup> describes a process of the construction of meaning in contemporary Paganism wherein ancient Paganisms are remixed together, along with new conceptions, in order to make a new meaning. This process can be described as, we don't know that we don't know and thus it becomes knowing. Early Wiccans didn't know that Wicca wasn't the continuation of a pre Christian goddess religion, so the idea that it was became their truth. It should be no surprise then that Cleopatra, a follower of a contemporary Pagan Isis group, is making meaning in this way. I am likewise a contemporary Pagan, whose religious understandings are a remix of prior knowledge. I sought to understand her actions, and mine, by understanding this process, as well as the challenges to it. The ancient Egyptians seem to have done the same thing. I suggest this is a general characteristic of all non monotheistic religions. Being not bound by the strictures of the monotheistic necessity of one truth such religions are free to remix and create anew in search of the perfect understanding for each individual. Hinduism is perhaps the exemplar of this tendency.

Hutton examines this process by focusing on how contemporary Paganism has evolved since the demise of the total hegemony in regards to religion that the Christian churches previously enjoyed<sup>524</sup>, but this process of remixing, of tending from a single truth, or truth being the sole domain of a single person, to a disseminated, democratization of truth is not unique to contemporary Paganism. It has been going on at least since ancient Egypt. In the Pyramid Texts the idea of a rebirth into another life belonged exclusively to the king. This concept of the exclusivity of rebirth evolved from the time of the Pyramid of Unas to the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts, by which time some aspects of a divine rebirth were possible for all<sup>525</sup>, and had its final form in the New Kingdom Books of the Dead such as the Papyrus of Ani, by which time all Egyptians hoped for a divine rebirth into another life. This democratized remix provided a framework for new meaning for the New Kingdom Egyptians in the same way that Cleopatra's remix provides meaning for her.

The development of the monotheistic religions from their polytheistic roots is likewise a remix. Not only did the Christians remix aspects of earlier Paganisms into their new religion<sup>526</sup> but they went on to develop their own religious understanding from a position where the ownership of divinity was restricted to one monadic god, which over time was gradually remixed, until the creation of the concept of the trinity arose. Access to this single god was also democratized gradually over time, leading to a new remix that no longer

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523 Hutton, R., (1991), *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 330-341.

524 Hutton, R., (1991), *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 285-341.

525 Wise, E., (2009), "An 'Odor of Sanctity': The Iconography, Magic and Ritual of Egyptian Incense", *Studia Antiqua*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 76.

526 Ferguson, E., (2003), *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, William B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids.

featured the racial component. Originally only those in the Jewish race could have the one god of Abraham. They were the chosen people. Then, the first step in the democratization process, Gentiles got access to him via the Christ remix, at first only if they agreed to follow the Mosaic law and then later without that requirement. Later Islam gave access to the same god to an even wider audience. Thus monotheism was remixed and democratized using the same process that Cleopatra used in the creation of her ritual. This process describes the creation of not only religions, but of culture. Cleopatra's remix is another instance in the ongoing meta remix that is the creation of culture. Her remix is informed by her own membership in a reconstructionist Isis religion, which she is trying to bring into the world.

In order to remix one must have information to inform one's remixing. As there are no Egyptologists at my university there was not much at all in the library and no Egyptological journals were subscribed to. I had to rely on document delivery to send me items from other libraries (that universities should spend so much money in moving around heavy items like books in an age when instant digital copying is abundant made me frankly incredulous), what I could find on the internet, and books I acquired for my own library. Cleopatra told me she relied exclusively on the internet for information and it was evident that much of her information was derived from popular culture.

Is it that the sources we have available to us shape our understandings, or do we seek out sources that support our preconceptions? Recent research<sup>527</sup> finds that people will see things as being in line with their beliefs regardless of the what the facts show. People will shape information to match their beliefs even if facts that contradict their beliefs are displayed before them while they are doing that shaping<sup>528</sup>. Cleopatra didn't change her view that the ancient Egyptians had serial reincarnation, even when provided with information that demonstrated this. She made the remix that suited her purpose. She wanted to act out her stated purpose in the sims, i.e. establishing that the reconstructionist Isis cult of which she was a member in meatspace was a reiteration of ancient Egyptian beliefs and practices. She took as much information as she felt she needed from original sources, remixed it with her own ideas and then presented it as historical fact.

Was I doing the same? At the start of my research I was not an expert in Egyptian culture or religion. The more I have studied ancient Egypt the more I realise my continuing shortcomings in this regard. But there I was judging her performance by my own limited understandings. I was falling victim to the presuppositions of the ethics committee. Presuming that I was better than an other. When really I was doing exactly the same thing as her, using the resources available to me to form an understanding that meshes with my

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527 Kahan, D. M., Peters, E., Dawson, E. C., Slovic, P., (2013), "Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government", *Yale Law School, Public Law Working Paper No. 307*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2319992>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

528 Kahan, D. M., Peters, E., Dawson, E. C., Slovic, P., (2013), "Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government", *Yale Law School, Public Law Working Paper No. 307*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2319992>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

reality tunnel. This is not arrogance but necessity. I see the universe through my reality tunnel, so it is unsurprising that I preference it. I was having my experience, not Cleopatra's.



## 6. Virtual Reality

In this chapter I shall relate how the virtual became the real for me. It is the story of how I became one with my avatar. I will relate a supreme irony, how a separatist had an integral experience and how doing so was the cause of my union with my avatar. Finally I relate how the series of events which facilitated this union ultimately led to the community's end.

### An Encounter With A Viking Reveals Discontent

The day after the Opening of the Mouth ritual I was talking with Horemheb and telling him about the ritual. We were in the Isis shrine and he noticed the donation box and became furious. He said he had not authorized it and reiterated his policy of prohibiting donation boxes. He paid for all the sims out of his own pocket and was annoyed that Cleopatra had put up the donation box as any money it collected would go to her rather than to him. He immediately deleted the donation box and said he would talk to Cleopatra about it.

He told me that he had been talking to Cleopatra and that she had mentioned that I had asked one of her friends to change their clothes from Gorean silks to Egyptian clothing at the ritual. He was aware that the high priests' council had forbidden Gorean silks from being worn in the temple and didn't understand why she was making such a fuss about it. But he advised me that she had claimed it was another example of my misogyny and that she felt I was trying to get rid of all women from the priesthood. His comment to me was "you have to keep the bitches in line brother". To which I replied that I had nothing at all against women in the priesthood, but rather that my objection was to Gor in Egypt. He reiterated his support for Gor but said we were free to do as we liked as far as rules for temple behavior.

The next day we had a high priests' meeting. Amon spoke about the problem of attracting people to the priesthood. Because he felt the problem was caused by the fact that most people wanted to do combat he had come up with a solution. He would create a priests' army, the army of Min. Min was a fertility god who was usually represented ithyphallically<sup>529</sup>. Amon had chosen Min as he was fond of the iconography of the god. In ancient Egypt the four divisions of the infantry were named after gods, but they were always the four gods of the monarchy, Amun, Re, Ptah and Set<sup>530</sup>. Cleopatra suggested that the new army could guard the temple newly dedicated to Isis.

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529 Wilkinson, R. H., (2003), *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, New York, pp. 115-117.

530 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 404.

The high priests' council accepted Amon's idea and it was put to the Pharaoh for his approval, who enthusiastically endorsed the idea of the new army. Amon, and his student Intef, set about recruiting for the Army of Min. They attracted several members who entered the priesthood as warrior soldiers. The army of Min reported to Amon, and if combat seemed likely they would come to the temple and receive instructions from him. He would accompany them to battle but only sometimes participated, though Intef was an enthusiastic combatant. But neither I nor any of the other high priests, except Amon, ever participated in the combat activities.

Perhaps because they had been accustomed to come to seek Amon's orders as high priest in charge of the army, one day some weeks later a squad leader of the army of Min rushed into the temple and declared that he had been escorting a princess through the desert and that Vikings were attacking Egypt. I was the only high priest in the temple at the time and I was both confused (Vikings?) and yet at the same time felt that as the sole representative of the priesthood in the sims at the time I should make an effort to assist the soldier and the princess. The princess asked that, as the squad leader was the only soldier present at the time, I accompany him to fend off the Vikings. I assured her that I was a non combatant but that I would come along and see how I could help. This was all communicated in character. The squad leader's urgency can be attributed to inter sim combat that had been going on. Combatants from various ancient themed sims would arrange battles with each other. Sometimes they would make unplanned sneak attacks. We trudged over to the far side of the sims to the area of the desert known as Cyrene. In the distance a lone Viking could be seen. I suggested to the soldier that I would go and see if I could talk with the Viking and see what was going on and that he should stay put and guard the priestess and, in order to avoid any threatening appearances he, being, in contrast to me, fully armed, should wait in hiding with the princess. They agreed and I set off.

The Viking didn't appear to be doing anything. I approached him and made a friendly greeting. He made no reply. In fact he didn't move at all. I instant messaged him which also resulted in no reply. It soon became obvious to me that he was afk (away from keyboard) and that, as such, he posed no threat at all to the mighty Egyptian army. He was probably just a curious visitor to the sims. I returned to the hidden soldier and advised him of my findings. We agreed that there was nothing to see here and began on our way back to the temple.

Just as we began to return, the Khasekhemui, the army that had been the sole army before the army of Min was created, appeared on the scene with a group of soldiers. He approached me and immediately began berating me. As we spoke more soldiers arrived, then the oracle appeared and soon there was quite a crowd.

Thutmose: this man seems to have no ill intentions toward us  
 Thutmose: he seems to be a traveler who has lost his way  
 Khasekhemui: Since when do Priests handle these sorts of matters?  
 Takelot: He had two friends with him earlier  
 Thutmose: since I was here  
 Thutmose: I spoke to him  
 Userkaf: and why did he fire at me  
 Thutmose: a greeting from a priest is less threatening than that from an impressive general like yourself  
 Khasekhemui: He could have killed you  
 Thutmose: if you were here general I would have left it to you  
 Khasekhemui: Em Hotep Commander  
 Thutmose: I am not afraid of death  
 Khasekhemui: That would not have been your decision  
 Thutmose: I look forward to walking with the gods in the Aaru  
 Berenike nods  
 Thutmose: only the Pharaoh and myself can decide my life  
 Khasekhemui: None of this is the place of the army of Min or the priesthood  
 Khasekhemui: Min should be defending the temple  
 Thutmose: but I shall leave this matter in your hands general  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Khasekhemui: Min is to be called if the army of Ra needs them  
 Thutmose: you would have soldiers of the Pharaoh sit idly at the temple gates while invaders ran into Egypt general?  
 Thutmose: we all serve the Pharaoh  
 Khasekhemui: That was not implied  
 Khasekhemui: you are not in Egypt now  
 Thutmose: our shared goal is to keep Egypt safe  
 Khasekhemui: and they are not invading  
 Thutmose: then why are you concerned that a priest went to talk to a stranger  
 Thutmose: concerned  
 Khasekhemui: He could have killed you  
 Thutmose: I am as willing to risk my life for Egypt as you general  
 Khasekhemui: There is no reason for a priest to meet all strangers in the desert  
 Thutmose: and I will do it with no weapons in my hands only with the gods walking with me  
 Khasekhemui: Then why do you need an army?  
 Thutmose: Are you suggesting that I may not greet strangers if I wish general?  
 Khasekhemui: This confuses me  
 Khasekhemui: No, not at all  
 Thutmose: let us not worry  
 Userkaf: commander  
 Thutmose: all seems well  
 Userkaf: can we go train  
 Thutmose: if you wish to remain on guard general I can only commend your diligence  
 Khenut: I will say this to all that were assembled here when I arrived  
 Khasekhemui listens  
 Khenut: you were about to go face something you are ill prepared for, these Vikings are ruthless and kill daily  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Khenut: they have taken out whole squads of our army before  
 Takelot nods in agreement with the Medjay Commander  
 Khenut: even your numbers would not have saved you  
 Berenike: That would argue for some training, squad to squad, then

Thutmose: let us not debate what might have been  
 Khenut: I was coming to try and speak with them .. I am glad the priest was able to do so and return safely  
 Thutmose: indeed  
 Thutmose: and it seems all is well  
 Thutmose: I shall return to the temple  
 Khenut: yes, but I would ask that next time do not show force when you are ill prepared  
 Berenike: I do wonder why they shot at our squad leader?  
 Khenut: just showing up with weapons drawn could have provoked them  
 Thutmose: I do not recall showing any force  
 Khasekhemui: He is lucky to be alive then  
 Thutmose: I spoke to a stranger  
 Khenut: the gathering of a force with weapons drawn is a show of force  
 Thutmose: which is why the armed man remained hidden behind this hill  
 Berenike: Squad leader, were you alone and with drawn weapon at the time they shot at you?  
 Khenut: still they love to fight  
 Userkaf: yes  
 Khasekhemui: You came out of Egypt with weapons drawn, this is not a sign of being friendly  
 Khasekhemui: why are you so far out here in Cyrene?  
 Khasekhemui: what business does Min have in Cyrene?  
 Khenut: these Vikings would have captured and enslaved you all ... I know they have done it before  
 Berenike: Because it has been decreed by Horemheb...  
 Khasekhemui: Oh?  
 Khasekhemui: I am not aware of such decree  
 Berenike: That Min defend the new temple of Isis in Cyrene  
 Khasekhemui: But they have denied connection to Min  
 Berenike: I am sorry, we do not raise the High Priestess above Pharaoh  
 Thutmose: can one be a priest of Egypt and not be a servant of the Pharaoh?  
 Khasekhemui: I am not objecting either of those points  
 Thutmose: is not the army of Min also comprised of servants of the Pharaoh  
 Khasekhemui: I serve the Pharaoh  
 Khenut: I think a clarification of jurisdiction and duties is needed  
 Takelot: Indeed  
 Khasekhemui: and seek to ensure that no one is doing him unjustly  
 Thutmose: why we you bickering among yourselves  
 Thutmose: all that has happened is that servants of the Pharaoh have rushed to defend his lands  
 Thutmose: would you not have that?  
 Thutmose: are we not all men of Egypt?  
 Thutmose: shall we fight amongst ourselves  
 Khasekhemui: I hope not  
 Khenut: This should be done at a higher level then here on this field.. The Generals of the two armies needed to meet with the Pharaoh to clarify  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Thutmose: and wither our numbers until no one is left to defend the greatest land on earth?  
 Khasekhemui: that is not the issue here  
 Thutmose: it is what I see here general  
 Thutmose: if the armies who ALL serve the Pharaoh are not brothers in arms then Egypt is lost  
 Thutmose: as one we are strong  
 Thutmose: as many we are weak



Thutmose: let us unite  
 Thutmose: and share the skills we have  
 Osorkon: High Priest who is your leader  
 Thutmose: so that we may better defend Egypt  
 Khenut: yes but do you not see what the General is trying to find out ... who is in charge where...  
 Thutmose: the Pharaoh  
 Osorkon: not god leader  
 Osorkon: who is leading this group  
 Khenut: on a field of battle we cannot have confusion  
 Thutmose: which group?  
 Osorkon: your group  
 Thutmose: I do not have a group other than the temple  
 Khasekhemui: The group of you standing here, who is in charge?  
 Osorkon: so did you ask to come here  
 Khenut: The army of Min is led I believe by Intef  
 Thutmose: no one is in charge  
 Takelot: Yes  
 Takelot: Intef is their commanding officer  
 Osorkon: did they ask Intef  
 Berenike: The Squad leader was here... and he it was who summoned the high priest  
 Osorkon: is what I am asking  
 Thutmose: the Berenike speaks rightly  
 Osorkon: who is the squad leader  
 Khasekhemui: He has run off  
 Khenut: yes, but my problem once again is knowing you were all ill prepared for what you were about to face  
 Thutmose: your concern is noted  
 Khenut: then we would have had to try and raise an army to save you  
 Thutmose: but all is well  
 Khenut: yes it is... this time  
 Osorkon: even I can't make a battle unless the general says  
 Thutmose: there is no profit in worry about what might have happened  
 Khenut: I must go .. the Viking has awoken and I need to speak with him  
 Khenut: Senebty all  
 Thutmose: we did not make a battle  
 Khasekhemui: Senebty  
 Thutmose: we talked to a stranger  
 Takelot: Peace, Khenut  
 Thutmose: I am returning to the temple  
 Thutmose: senebty general  
 Khasekhemui: Senebty  
 Thutmose: Senebty commanded  
 Osorkon: well I hope you are right Thutmose  
 Thutmose: about what?  
 Osorkon: I have seen high people condemned for just going into something without asking  
 Osorkon: squad leaders more importantly  
 Osorkon: just by experience  
 Osorkon: that is why I say I hope you are right  
 Thutmose: I am saddened by your words commander  
 Osorkon: don't go without say by a high official  
 Thutmose: you should applaud those who are motivated to protect Egypt  
 Thutmose: apart from the princess, who asked me to come, I was the highest ranking person at hand  
 Osorkon: you need to make sure it is alright by rank if you just go to start something then you can get condemned  
 Khasekhemui: If Egypt was under attack, I would say all should fight to

protect, but we were not attacked, your soldiers provoked a dangerous man in the desert

Berenike: And, as long as this silly turf war goes on... that means that Min will always sit idly by while Egypt is invaded... no matter how prepared we might be

Thutmose: talking to a stranger is not starting something

Khasekhemui: Your squad leader approached him with hostility

Thutmose: It is you who are seeking confrontation here

Khasekhemui: Don't tell me what I seek

Thutmose: and he is not my squad leader

Thutmose: then speak with him

Khasekhemui: Min is not your army?

Thutmose: Min is the army of the pharaoh, but its leader is the high priest Amon, who has given the generalship over to Intef.

Khasekhemui nods

Khasekhemui: I will speak with General Intef about this

Khasekhemui: Senebty

Thutmose: do speak with the general

Khasekhemui: If we all fight for the same cause, why have separate armies?

Khasekhemui: obviously you have another purpose

Thutmose: it is at the Pharaoh's discretion what armies Egypt has

Thutmose: my only purpose is to serve the gods

Khasekhemui: so he must have a reason then

Thutmose: I do not know the god king's reasons

Berenike: It is very simple, General.

Berenike: One army only, led by an ambitious general can change the dynasty

Khasekhemui grows angry

Berenike: That is the political reality

Berenike: It has happened in Rome

Khasekhemui: so the other army is to protect from our army?

Berenike: And it has happened in Egypt twice before

Thutmose: you must ask the Pharaoh what he plans for his armies

Khasekhemui: I am asking him about what he said

Berenike: The Lord of Two Lands has led armies... he knows about the ambitions of generals

Thutmose: I find it a matter of great sadness general that you seem more concerned with your own status than with protecting Egypt alongside any army the Pharaoh has commissioned

Thutmose: are we not all children of the gods

Thutmose: do we not all serve the Pharaoh?

Khasekhemui: You keep telling me what I am thinking and that is enough of that

Thutmose: are not all our lives and ranks at his discretion

Khasekhemui: Listen to my words

Thutmose: I hear you words general

Khasekhemui: The army of Ra is to protect Egypt and the Pharaoh

Khasekhemui: The army of Min is to protect the temple, and assist the Army of Ra

Thutmose: and they tell me, for some reason I know not, you have no love for those of us who serve the gods

Khasekhemui: Stop telling me how I feel!

Berenike: excuse me... but it seems that our Viking has become very interested in the Medjay

Thutmose: I am not telling you how you feel

Thutmose: I am telling you what your words and actions say to me  
Khasekhemui waves his hand off at the Priest  
Berenike: Perhaps we should move away and discuss this elsewhere?  
Thutmose: I am returning to the temple  
Khasekhemui: I am going to make sure Khenut is safe

I returned to the temple, confused as to what had caused the general's anger. He obviously resented the army of Min's creation, but it seemed odd he had chosen to vent his anger on me as, although the army of Min belonged to the priesthood, I had never participated in any of its activities and was known to be a non combatant. The next day I arrived to find the sim abuzz. As I logged on I received a notecard from Cleopatra sent to all priests.

## Notecard - Proclamation Of The High Priestess of Isis

The Temple of Isis hereby disavows any association with the "Army of Min" and their group of "holy warriors". We who worship the Goddess believe in peace, and we trust our lord god, Ptolemy Soter, Most-High, Pharaoh of Egypt, to keep us safe and protected in these troubled times.

Any and all Priests, Priestesses, and Aspirants who honor allegiance to the Goddess Isis shall be given safe haven within the temples of Isis in Alexandria and Cyrene. Those who may wish to join the Temple of Isis may contact Cleopatra, High Priestess, Illustrious One of our Mother Goddess.

Blessings be onto you Priests and Priestesses of Egypt

Amon messaged me as soon as I arrived and asked me if I knew anything about this. He was deeply upset that Cleopatra had made a proclamation without consulting the high priests' council. Several other high priests were also consternated and we had a meeting, although Cleopatra was nowhere to be seen. Everyone was concerned that Cleopatra's proclamation would divide the priesthood and everyone was unhappy she had made a unilateral statement without asking anyone else first. After the meeting Amon issued a statement on behalf of the high priests' council.

## Notecard - Reply From The High Priest

Venerable Sisters and Brothers... it is with regret that I find it necessary to censure our sister, the High Priestess Cleopatra for acting in a manner that calls into question the actions of the High Counsel.

A message sent out to the entire priesthood that indicated her personal opinions which went directly against a decision to develop the Army of Min, a division of the Pharaoh's Armies of which Pharaoh is in fact a member. This was discussed and accepted at our most recent Council meeting. This action shows what might be considered contempt for this counsel and the Order of Osiris in general.

I can only imagine what the gods are saying amongst themselves, especially at this time of drought and famine. The High Priestess should be makings offerings to Min, the fertility deity, and welcoming his place amongst us. Instead, she makes public pronouncements which could very well have the effect of splitting our forces and resources.

This was ill considered and disrespectful of her Brothers and Sisters in this council. I respectfully require that this council make an immediate determination, demanding that the High Priestess publicly retract her statement, apologize for her ill considered actions, and make a commitment to consult with all of us before she makes any other such public pronouncement.

She must keep in mind that she is the guardian of all the gods and is privileged to serve Isis. Isis is not her personal domain... to think so is blasphemous. Also let it be known that all the children of Egypt are welcome to all the temples of the land all the time.

We didn't see Cleopatra at all that day and it wasn't until the next day that she logged in again. As soon as she did, without talking to anyone (several high priests were logged in) she sent a proclamation to all the priests. Proclamations could only be sent by high priests and were always sent in character. But this one of Cleopatra's was OOC.

## Notecard - Proclamation By The High Priestess Of Isis

I would like to put into historical perspective the context of my recent role-play actions, and my reasons therefore. As I have affirmed many times over this past four months, my ONLY purpose here is to establish the presence of the religion of the Goddess Isis... which is an implicit, historical fact of the times.

As we all know, the Greek Pharaoh Ptolemy fell in love with Egypt. He fell in love with the history and the grandeur of that had once been the greatest civilization of all time. He sought to rebuild the culture and the temples... and to try to save Egypt from the sands of Seth. Many historians have stated that they believe Egypt was essentially in ruins by this time; an archaeological site in 300 BC. No one knew how to read

hieroglyphics, and the old Gods were simply shadows of crumbling statues and ancient temples.

Yet, from this romantic love affair the Greeks had with Egypt, sometime around 300 BC, the Goddess Isis was born, and in a matter of just a couple hundred years she became the dominant faith of the Mediterranean. As far as we know, Isis was a recreation; a hybrid Grecian-Egyptian faith based on ancient local myth and modern Greek influence of the time. The Pharaoh Ptolemy II himself became a convert to Isis and ordered the construction of the main temple complex at the island of Philae.

This is not debatable ... it is not negotiable. If we wish to play as accurately as possible in this world, we simply MUST acknowledge and allow for these historical facts. Playing my role as this original High Priestess to Isis ... I am responsible as the re-enactor of this very history.

Now, for as much as I could, I have tried to stay out of the petty squabbles and political RP of our Second Life Egypt. However, I now find myself drawn into a scenario, which will inexorably change the context of the Priesthood, regardless which way I play it.

With all of my research I believe there is no historical presence for an "Army of Min", in 300 BC, or at any other time either. Let alone, that there ever-existed one, all-powerful priesthood of Egypt at this time. In my opinion, this male-dominated, warrior-priest army, created and dedicated to the cult of Osiris, is direct and absolute reaction to the recent acknowledgement of Isis in our simulation. An army is an instrument of power, designed for one thing, and one thing alone ... rule by force.

Therefore, given the two choices; of allowing this non-historical, sexist, domination of our religious role-play; or standing up and separating myself, and the cult of Isis, which I am directly responsible for ... I have elected to choose to take the high ground. I will follow the historical and factual reality of the third century B.C. ... regardless of the dictates of this false, and soon to become oppressive, Osiris Priesthood.

This is a fascinating document. In it Cleopatra uses an argument of historical authenticity to support the establishment of a recreationist Isis cult. It is however a confused mix of historical inaccuracies. Firstly she is confusing the Pharaoh of the sims, Ptolemy I Soter, with his son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Our sims were set in 300 BCE. Ptolemy I Soter reigned until 282 BCE when his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus ascended to the throne<sup>531</sup> and it was he who was the first of the Ptolemys to extend the pre-existing temple to Isis at Philae, though much of the temple was constructed under the auspices of later Ptolemys<sup>532</sup>. Her statement that Ptolemy, whichever one she is referring to, was a "convert" to the cult of Isis is problematic as it implies a monotheistic

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531 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 3, pp. 76-77.

532 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 3, pp. 42-43.

understanding of religious adherence. There is no doubt that all the Ptolemys from Ptolemy II Philadelphus on did extensive building at Philae, but the spread of the cult of Isis at this time was not driven by the Ptolemys but rather was a popular phenomenon among merchants, priests and private devotees<sup>533</sup>. Moreover Isis was an ancient goddess and was not born around 300 BCE<sup>534</sup>.

After having asserted these historically erroneous facts, Cleopatra goes on to argue that the army of Min has no historical basis and accuses the other high priests of having created the army of Min in order to oppress the cult of Isis and further accuses us of "non-historical, sexist, domination of our religious role-play". We were flabbergasted to say the least. Cleopatra came to the temple a few minutes later and advised us that she was leaving for the temple of Isis in Cyrene and wouldn't be back in the temple of Osiris or Alexandria.

Although the Egyptians had a much more egalitarian culture when it came to relations between genders than most chronologically concurrent societies, it was however the case that female priests did not have the same status as males. Although priestesses seem to have had a more equal status with priests in the Old Kingdom, by the time of the New Kingdom this status had diminished and there are many fewer documented instances of females holding priestly positions at that time<sup>535</sup>. While women had participated in religious life as musicians and dancers from the earliest days, by the later periods there were few roles other than these available to them<sup>536</sup>.

It is clear that what was happening here was that a remix of ideas was being created in order to form a new understanding. It is key that what was being sought was authenticity. Things as they really were. I don't see a desire to deliberately deceive. However the remix is being put forward as historical fact. This phenomenon has been widespread in the formation of contemporary Paganisms. Perhaps the most well discussed example is the idea of a matriarchal, magical religion of witches in Europe that had been extant since prehistoric times and of which contemporary witches were simply the continuation<sup>537</sup>. Though Margaret Murray is perhaps the best known proponent of this idea, she was the inheritor of earlier ideas. As early as 1839 Karl-Ernst Jarke and Franz-Josef Mone proposed that the victims of the witch hunts had merely been practicing a surviving Pagan religion. In 1862 Jules Michelet, an ardent anti catholic writer, penned *La Sociere* in which he outlined a feminist, nature worshiping religion of witches, led by priestesses which was wholly joyful, democratic and pacifist<sup>538</sup>. In 1899 *Aradia* appeared

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533 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, p. 190.

534 Redford, D. B. (ed), (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York, Vol. 2, pp. 188-191.

535 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 67.

536 Sauneron, S., (2000), *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 67.

537 Murray, M. A., (1921), *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford.

538 Ankarloo, B. (ed), Clark, S. (ed), (1999), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth*

claiming to be the gospel of an Italian Pagan religion<sup>539</sup>. While it is incontestable that such works as these contributed to the formation of Wicca, Murray's ideas were discredited as unhistorical by such writers as Thomas<sup>540</sup> in the period from 1970-1990<sup>541</sup>.

For some time the results of academic work on the subject have been slow to be adopted by members of contemporary Paganisms.

We Neopagans now face a crisis. As new data appeared, historians altered their theories to account for it. We have not. Therefore an enormous gap has opened between the academic and the "average" Pagan view of witchcraft. We continue to use of out-dated and poor writers, like Margaret Murray, Montague Summers, Gerald Gardner, and Jules Michelet. We avoid the somewhat dull academic texts that present solid research, preferring sensational writers who play to our emotions. For example, I have never seen a copy of Brian Levack's *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* in a Pagan bookstore. Yet half the stores I visit carry Anne Llewellyn Barstow's *Witchcraze*, a deeply flawed book which has been ignored or reviled by most scholarly historians.

We owe it to ourselves to study the Great Hunt more honestly, in more detail, and using the best data available. Dualistic fairy tales of noble witches and evil witch-hunters have great emotional appeal, but they blind us to what happened. And what could happen, today. Few Pagans commented on the haunting similarities between the Great Hunt and America's panic over Satanic cults. Scholars noticed it; we didn't. We say 'Never again the Burning!' But if we don't know what happened the first time, how are we ever going to prevent it from happening again?<sup>542</sup>

Most previous researchers of magic, what few there were, prior to the explosive growth of the academic study of magic since the mid twentieth century, had been skeptics or outright critics of magical practices. Since then a new generation of scholars have arrived and many of them are not only advocates of magical understandings but practitioners of magical religions. This has provided a pathway for the crossover of academic work into contemporary magical religions, and many Wiccans now acknowledge that

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*Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, pp. 31-32.

539 Ankarloo, B. (ed), Clark, S. (ed), (1999), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 32.

540 Thomas, K., (1991), *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Penguin Books, London.

541 Ankarloo, B. (ed), Clark, S. (ed), (1999), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, pp. 35.

542 Gibbons, J., (1998), "Recent Developments in the Study of The Great European Witch Hunt", *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, Issue 5, pp. 2-16.

theirs is a new religious movement, not a continuation of an ancient religion<sup>543</sup>. However there are still some who claim adherence to the idea of Wicca as the inheritor of a pre-Christian religion<sup>544</sup>.

Since Gibbons' remarks there has been increased attention being paid to historical sources that provide information about magic. I expect that as time goes by and these new religions mature they will come to reflect the findings of academic work more. I say this not only because of the rise of practitioner academics, but also on account of the ascendancy of the religion of scientism, or as Noble calls it the "religion of technology"<sup>545</sup>. Science and technology are held in such high regard by such a large percentage of the population<sup>546</sup> that only the most committed will reject the findings of its high priests, the members of the academy, especially when that academy is populated by adherents of these new religions. Because of this latter fact, it is no longer necessary for contemporary Pagans to reject wholesale the work of scholars who deride magic on purely reactionary grounds. There are now scholars who admit magical realities. As persecution and derision subside, fundamentalist positions are no longer necessary. However at this time there are still those who will continue to promote their own remixes as singular truths.

Ideas from fiction have been blended with scholarly understandings to form new understandings and adopted by members of contemporary Paganisms<sup>547</sup>. But the ideas of fiction are often remixes of historically verifiable events or ideas. Where is the line between fiction and history? This question really is about the line between art and science. That there should be a division between them, that they should not be a blended whole, is a post enlightenment development. There was no such line in ancient Egypt. There was no fiction and no non fiction. There were stories that gave understandings. Despite the modern acceptance of the religion of science, and its insistence on the importance of facts and of repeatability, we mesh fact and fiction to form new understandings all the time. I am doing this here. There is simply less fiction in science than in religion. The fictions of science are such things as the conception that only things that are repeatable and measurable are true.

## The Isis Shrine Is Ransacked

The day after Cleopatra's proclamation she rushed to see the first high priest, who was meeting with the oracle, in the temple of Osiris and told him, in character, that she had been attacked and warned she was in danger. She felt

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543 Hutton, R., (2001), *The Triumph of the Moon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

544 Janus-Mithras, Nuit-Hilaria, Mer-Amun, (1981), *Wicca the Ancient Way*, <http://dreaminghades.com/wicca-the-ancient-way>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

545 Noble, D., (1999), *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*, Penguin, New York.

546 Barnes, I., (2005), "Debating the Theological Implications of New Technologies", *Theology and Science*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 179-196.

547 Cusack, C., (2010), *Invented Religions*, Ashgate, Farnham.



sure the rest of the priests had it in for her and had organised the attack due to her opposition to the army of Min. Seti calmed her and told her he was sure that wasn't the case but then the oracle took her to task saying it was she who had divided the priesthood and that she should respect the high priests' council and not sow dissent.

## Chat Excerpt - The Oracle Chastises Cleopatra

Berenike: Do you think I see only pleasant things when the Veil is drawn aside?  
Berenike: Hardly ever.  
Cleopatra shakes her hear  
Cleopatra: head  
Berenike: I see the ambitions, the greed, the fear....  
Cleopatra: No I imagine not  
Berenike: and the consequences of every foolish act.  
Berenike: That affects Egypt.  
Cleopatra: And you see that I have so harmed our lands?  
Berenike: I do.  
Cleopatra: By mistrust of this army?  
Berenike: No... but speaking and acting before acquiring knowledge.  
Berenike: That was less than wise.  
Cleopatra: My guidance... like yours... comes from the Gods  
Berenike: Does it? Or from an attempt to raise yourself in power?  
Cleopatra: No ... I assure you not  
Berenike: There is no wrong in such an attempt.  
Berenike: But the wrong comes by how it is attempted.  
Cleopatra: trust in absolute power and authority... especially armed authority is always a dangerous path  
Berenike: And, who is armed and in absolute authority in Egypt?  
Berenike: And, it is truth that some in the armies and in the priesthood struggle for power, and maybe the ultimate power.  
Cleopatra narrows her eyes  
Cleopatra: Yes ... of this I am sure  
Berenike: I am not blind.  
Berenike: I see the smiles behind some words...  
Berenike: And the frustrated anger behind others.  
Berenike: And, they lead to the same thing...a struggle for power by those who wear blinders.  
Cleopatra nods  
Berenike: Both are foolish, and one will go to the chopping block.  
Cleopatra Looks shocked  
Berenike: I am the Oracle at Siwa, servant of Amun-Ra.  
Berenike: I may not choose sides.  
Cleopatra: /nods and bows to the Oracle  
Berenike: but I see the Gods smile.  
Berenike: Continue to amuse them.  
Berenike: But, do NOT destroy Egypt while you are about it.  
Berenike: THAT is NOT permitted.

Some time went by and things seemed to have calmed down a bit. Cleopatra had never returned to the temple of Osiris. She had set up an additional shrine to Isis in Cyrene and had been soliciting priestess to join her Isis cult.

One had joined. I arrived in the sim one day to find the Isis shrine in the temple of Osiris in disarray. There were several priests there and then Cleopatra arrived, with the general of the army of Ra and the vizier in tow. Cleopatra was screaming that the shrine had been destroyed and the priesthood must be to blame. All the priests present were denying this when I arrived. It is interesting to note that no one but Cleopatra or Horemheb could have disturbed the shrine as all the objects in it were Cleopatra's and so she and Horemheb were the only people who could move them. The only reason the Isis shrine was still intact at the temple of Osiris was that we had been waiting for Horemheb to come along and remove the items as none of us could move them.

I launch into the role play. I relate that I had had a dream the previous night in which Osiris came to me and told me that he was displeased with the division in the priesthood and that he wanted order restored. I explain that he had said he wanted the Isis shrine removed from his temple as it was the seed of distemper, and for the priesthood to be reunited. Cleopatra explodes "IT WAS YOU!!!!!!". She launches into a vitriolic attack on the priesthood in general and me in particular. Not my character, but me. She swaps in and out of character. Both in the local channel and to me directly. She instant messaged me OOC abuse about how I had always wanted to get rid of her and how I was an evil misogynist.

Soon many more members of the army of Ra arrive in the temple. They too all verbally attack me in particular, as the destroyer of the shrine, and all other priests present as subverters of their control of the sims. We ask them to leave the temple as they are all armed and weapons are prohibited in the temple. They refuse to leave. They began trying to goad me. The general clearly wants to attack me. He advances and draws his weapon, only to realise he can't attack me as I don't have a meter on. He shouts at me in local to put on a meter, an OOC action, and to face him like a man. He IMs me and says how evil I am for telling Horemheb that Cleopatra had put a donation box in the Isis shrine. I tell him that I did not do that, and that Horemheb was in the shrine and saw it himself. He accuses me of lying. I ignore him while myself and the other priests continue to ask the soldiers to leave the temple. They continue to refuse. This goes on for some time. We priests send a messenger to the Pharaoh asking him to send help to resolve the situation. The messenger arrives back from the Pharaoh saying that the Pharaoh had the same dream as I. He says the Pharaoh has ordered the soldiers to leave the temple immediately and the priests to cleanse the temple and remove the Isis shrine. The soldiers continue to refuse to leave and there is agitated milling around.

Suddenly Cleopatra says she is feeling unwell and has to lie down. She goes into a part of the temple only allowed to priests and lies down. Myself and another priest go into the room Cleopatra is in, role playing attending to her health, the other priests remain in the outer temple trying to get the soldiers to leave. The vizier starts attacking the priests saying that by restricting entry

to the temple to only priests we are trying to subvert control of the sim. She alleges we have a "secret plot against all those who are into Gor", then correcting herself for an OOC usage, says "into combat". We reply that we are abiding by the law of Egypt. She accused us of lying. Then the soldiers enter the restricted area. We tell them they are not allowed into that part of the temple and they began to abuse us saying that we priests think we can run the sims how we like. Not that we priests can run Egypt how we like, but the sims. They refused to leave for some time. Then suddenly they all leave. Cleopatra says she is feeling worse and calls for wine. The other priest with me goes to fetch wine for her and I stay to try to calm her down. The moment he is out of the room Cleopatra's meter declares she has been killed. As the members of the army are outside, many tens of metres away, they can't possibly have heard the announcement of her meter. But they all instantly rush back into the temple and declare her dead and me the perpetrator.

In this moment I become Thutmose. I experience a moment of blind panic. Real panic. I am being framed for murder. There was no one else in the room who can witness that I didn't kill her. What will I do? I am only aware of the temple. The meatspace world has totally disappeared from my consciousness, even though I am typing and using the keyboard to move the avatar. The soldiers of the army of Ra are surrounding me and accusing me and threatening to drag me off to the Pharaoh. Several of them are IMing me to accuse and threaten me, both in and out of character simultaneously. I decides to flee from the crowd of soldiers and begin to leave the room. Then something clicks. Wait on. I couldn't have murdered her. To do so I would have to be wearing a meter. I don't ever wear a meter. I again become separate from my character. I realise that an OOC circumstance (no meter) is my defense for an in character murder. I begin to express my defense in role play. I say how much my character is renowned as a pacifist and never carries a weapon. The general replies that it is not fair that I never wear a meter. The army demand I be brought before the Pharaoh. I agree. Let's go see the Pharaoh.

We arrive before the Pharaoh and he hears explanations from both sides. During these explanations the general of the army of Ra accuses me of murdering Cleopatra. I say that I am a peaceful man known for his non violence. The general replies that anyone can pick up a weapon in the heat of the moment. I reply that I had taken a vow to the gods and would never do so. The general replies that Cleopatra's meter showed she was dead and I was the only person there. The Pharaoh remarks that he doesn't know what this meter thing that the general is referring to is. This is a common role play tactic used when someone refers to an OOC thing in an in character situation. The general launches into a speech about how I never wear a meter and that I should be made to. The Pharaoh gives him the 'no idea what a meter is' line again. But adds that he knows me to be a peaceable man who would never raise a weapon. The general replies that he thinks the priests have their own way too much in the sims and that we never should have been allowed to start an army. The Pharaoh replies that the general must be afflicted by heat stroke as he is raving about sims, meters and other nonsensical words.

The Pharaoh tells the combatants that they are not to enter the temple areas forbidden to them again and adds that they should go back to their duties. He asks the priests to resanctify the temple. Horemheb then IM's me to say that the vizier had been complaining to him about how the temple had areas restricted to priests and how she thought we were up to something. He suggests that rather than having the prohibition being only a rule we set up the restricted areas using locking scripts on the doors as this would only allow members of the priests' group to open particular doors. I implemented his suggestion that day.

## Chat Excerpt - Thutmose Is Framed For Murder

Cleopatra: Why would anyone anger the Gods??  
Khasekhemui: I do not know  
Djoser: brother Thutmose  
Khasekhemui: I do not understand  
Djoser: have u seen this  
Thutmose: no I have just arrived  
Djoser: someone has destroyed the temple of Isis  
Cleopatra: {sobs}  
Khasekhemui: Have the Medjay been alerted?  
Serethor: omg  
Khasekhemui: where was Min?  
Serethor: is there any of them here?  
Serethor: everyone is ok?  
Thutmose: I think they are all asleep at this time  
Cleopatra: Aaaahhhhhh h whhhhyyyyyy?  
Cleopatra shakes her head  
Serethor: em hotep  
Djoser: em hotep  
Cleopatra sobs  
Khasekhemui: Has anyone looked around for culprits still lurking about?  
Cleopatra tears at her hair  
Cleopatra sobbing  
Thutmose: did anyone see anything?  
Djoser: no everything was silent  
Serethor: general want me take a round at the desert?  
Djoser: until I came here  
Cleopatra: no ... no ... I just arrived at dawn to find this!!  
Thutmose: it is as I feared  
Khasekhemui: Yes check the area Serethor and be careful  
Serethor: yes sir  
Serethor: draw bow  
Khasekhemui: and why would only this area be attacked?  
Cleopatra: Who would do such a thing brother Thutmose??  
Khasekhemui furrows his brow  
Thutmose: let me tell you all  
Thutmose: I hid this because I hoped it would not come true  
Thutmose: last night I had a terrible dream  
Cleopatra: What?  
Thutmose: Osiris came to me and warned me  
Thutmose: he was enraged  
Thutmose: and flew about the temple  
Thutmose: it was terrible to see

Thutmose: he said  
 Thutmose: "I am Osiris, lord of the underworld"  
 Thutmose: "mightiest of gods"  
 Thutmose: mightiest  
 Thutmose: "I shall share my temple with no one"  
 Thutmose: "not even my sister wife"  
 Khasekhemui eyes the priest with suspicion  
 Cleopatra: Nooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
 Thutmose: and then in my dream he did exactly what I now see before me  
 Djoser: he has destroyed the temple of Isis  
 Cleopatra: This cannot be!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!111  
 Thutmose: we will ask the oracle  
 Cleopatra: No no no!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!11  
 Thutmose: if she had any similar premonitions  
 Thutmose consoles Cleopatra  
 Thutmose: sister  
 Thutmose: be at peach  
 Thutmose: peace  
 Thutmose: I know this is hard to take  
 Cleopatra sobs hysterically  
 Thutmose: but we must go with the will of the gods  
 Thutmose hugs Cleopatra  
 Thutmose: shhh child  
 Thutmose: the gods love us but they are also capricious  
 Cleopatra: no no no ... shaking him away ....  
 Khasekhemui: And where were you two when this happened?  
 Thutmose: and we cannot know their meanings all the time  
 Cleopatra: IT WAS YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!! she screams  
 Cleopatra sobs  
 Thutmose: calm yourself  
 Thutmose: you are a high priestess of Egypt  
 Cleopatra: why would the Priesthood turn against the Goddess???  
 Thutmose: you must set a fine example  
 Thutmose: the priesthood has not turned against the goddess  
 Cleopatra: Nooooo!!  
 Thutmose: no one in their right mind would turn their back on the mighty Isis  
 Thutmose: for she is a powerful goddess  
 Khasekhemui: Where were you when this all happened?  
 Cleopatra shakes her head .....  
 Thutmose: to whom are you speaking general  
 Khasekhemui: I am speaking to you  
 Cleopatra: I just arrived this morning from Cyrene  
 Cleopatra: We were attacked this morning  
 Khasekhemui: Did you see anyone Thutmose?  
 Thutmose: I have been consulting the high priestess of set for the last couple of hours and before that with the priestess of Nepthys  
 Cleopatra: They came after the grain  
 Serethor: sheath bow  
 Serethor: em hotep  
 Khasekhemui: ((Thutmose you don't have a meter on))  
 Cleopatra sobs hysterically  
 Khasekhemui: Find anyone Serethor?  
 Serethor: no one suspicious  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Khasekhemui: So no one saw anything?  
 Cleopatra: Aaaahhhhhhhh whyyyyyyyyyy????????!!  
 Thutmose: child we cannot know the way of the gods  
 Thutmose: if they have decreed this we must accept it

Serethor: I see something  
 Khasekhemui: I expect the Medjay will be here shortly  
 Serethor: draw bow  
 Thutmose: you will have your temple elsewhere  
 Serethor: closer the river  
 Cleopatra: GODS DID NOT DO THIS!!  
 Cleopatra: Men did this!!!  
 Thutmose: how can you know this if you did not see it happen  
 Khasekhemui: Who is that masked person?  
 Khasekhemui: Stop!  
 Khasekhemui: Who are you?  
 Meresankh looks around  
 Cleopatra wails  
 Meresankh: Me?  
 Djoser: brother Thutmose turn around and stand back  
 Khasekhemui: Yes, what are you doing here?  
 Meresankh: I am just a visitor of this temple  
 Serethor: yes you  
 Meresankh: I wish to pray to the Gods  
 Serethor: why are you masked?  
 Khasekhemui looks to the approaching Medjay  
 Meresankh: Because I don't want to get sunburn  
 Nebet: looks to Khasekhemui  
 Khasekhemui: Serethor inspect her for weapons  
 Serethor: sheath bow  
 Meresankh: I am unarmed  
 Serethor: sheath bow  
 Serethor approaches the stranger  
 Nebet: ok sorry  
 Meresankh lifts up her cloak to show she is carrying no weapons  
 Serethor: and start looks for hidden weapons  
 Serethor: I believe she is clear sir  
 Khasekhemui nods  
 Meresankh: You surely know that I cannot enter the temple with weapons  
 Khasekhemui looks around at the mess for anything left behind  
 Meresankh: weapons\*  
 Nebet: looks to Serethor  
 Thutmose: she is correct  
 Serethor: what is your name lady?  
 Cleopatra: Brother Djoser ... will you escort me to my chambers ... I must lay down or I will certainly die  
 Thutmose: you should all not have weapons her  
 Djoser: yes  
 Djoser: please follow me  
 Khasekhemui: I am her for protection  
 Thutmose: whose protection?  
 Khasekhemui: protection\*  
 Khasekhemui: The temple and priest's  
 Meresankh: Now excuse me. \*ignores the Squad leaders question\*  
 Thutmose: we are grateful to you general  
 Khasekhemui: Excuse  
 Thutmose: but I say to you this deed is the work of the gods  
 Meresankh: Oh  
 Khasekhemui: Please come out of there  
 Meresankh: What is this?  
 Meresankh: Who did this?  
 Nebet: what is going on general?  
 Khasekhemui: We are trying to figure out

Meresankh: Who has insulted the Goddess like this?  
Meresankh: She will punish them!!  
Thutmose: it was Osiris himself  
Nebet: wow  
Meresankh looks around "Oh no my dear priest, it was not Osiris."

It was clear from these events that a deep division had developed between the combatants and the priesthood, and that this was overflowing from in character interactions to OOC. It was in fact so severe that it would have a terminal effect on the community. This was however not, for me, the most interesting revelation to arise from the abovementioned events. Rather it was that I had become Thutmose. But Thutmose didn't exist. Thutmose was a fiction that I had created, but who nevertheless had become me. By becoming me he had acquired the capacity for subjective experience. The ability to partake in the divine purpose of being. Granted it had been for only a couple of minutes, but nevertheless, what I like to think of as my primary self, my meatspace self, the self that thinks and acts and reacts and feels, had assimilated the character of Thutmose so completely that I had experienced a moment of fear and panic when he was threatened. What's even more interesting is that there is no way that either my meatspace self or Thutmose could have been actually harmed in any other way than emotionally. My body was safe at the other end of an extremely long and technologically mediated distance and Thutmose never wore a meter. Why then had I (we?) panicked? The only answer I can see is that I had become Thutmose and thus the consequences to Thutmose were real consequences for me.

Thutmose, if he had his own consciousness, would know that, even though he was a priest and a pacifist, it would have been completely possible that he could be attacked by the evil transgressors who had violated the holy temple space with their weapons and their uncleansed presence. In that moment Thutmose did have consciousness, he had my consciousness. He had become a thinking, feeling being. He had, by means of his possession of my consciousness, the ability to act in the meatspace world. His panic had caused me to move my meatspace body to effect his fleeing. He also had the ability for subjective experience. My consciousness was having his subjective experience. He had become an expression of the divine purpose of subjective being, albeit through a borrowed consciousness. Perhaps our meatspace selves are the same? Sometimes we lose control. In extremis, say hyperventilation, something shuts down the consciousness so it can restore regular breathing in order to achieve homeostasis. Is this our consciousness being hijacked by the body, or perhaps our higher self acting, in the same way Thutmose acted by hijacked my consciousness when he feared for his survival?

Whatever the truth is, this experience is an exemplar of the ontological status of virtual worlds. It is Thomas' Theorem<sup>548</sup> in action. I believed that the situation in the world had real consequences for me to such an extent that it provoked my fight and flight response.

## Decline And Fall

The tumultuous events in the temple the day of Cleopatra's alleged murder were a harbinger of doom for the community. Rather than trying to resolve the events that had unfolded in role play, partly because tensions between groups were of a sufficient level that they seemed irredeemable, Horemheb decided that he would push the reset button. Accordingly he sent out this notecard to everyone in the community.

## Notecard - A New Beginning

19/10/2008

Welcome to a New Begining!!!

It has always been the intention that the Anachronistic Lands sims are committed to 24/7, In Character Role Play.

I have allowed non role play, OOC conversations and behaviors to fester and grow, which, I feel, have had both a negative impact to role play, as well as a direct impact in our membership.

As the owner and visionary of these role play sims, I feel it is my responsibility to instate rules that add to the positive and smooth flow of rp for all who choose to spend time here. In an effort to facilitate this, I have decided to disband all current groups within the sims and open a new, main group, as well as enforce the 100% 24/7 in-character rp that has always been the goal of these sims.

A new main group has been formed, Anachronistic Lands. Any who are interested in role play here may come and fill out an application to be added to the group. Please note, if you are currently an active role player on the sims you will still need to come and re-apply as well. We will re-open for active role play on SATURDAY, OCT. 25 at 9AM SLT. At that time, we will also be opening our two new sims "Persia"!

While some of you may choose to leave, we wish you well. For those who decide to continue in the rich and varied role play of Anachronistic Lands, this is a chance to learn from past mistakes and re-make role play that offers an experience that is truly fun and positive for all.

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548 Thomas, W. I., Thomas, D. S., (1928), *The Child In America: Behavior Problems and Programs*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, p 572.



As always, I am accessible to all via IM or notecard.

Thank you for your continued support

Horemheb

Although this action would certainly diffuse any role play confusion and contention, it did nothing to stem the flow of OOC grief that we all continued to experience. Everyone was very unhappy about this turn of events and accusations of blame flew around like corvidae spectres. There was suddenly a lot of grieving in the sims and, in the period between this announcement and new role play beginning, there was no role play at all. Some members left to join other role play communities, while others went temporarily to other communities so as to be able to participate in role play during the time there was none in Ptolemaic Egypt. Some members of the community who had been role playing in other communities all along started to recruit heavily for those communities, urging people not to remain in Ptolemaic Egypt at all. The vizier was chief among these and among the griefers. These activities became so disruptive that Horemheb had his closest assistant issue the following announcement in an attempt to stem the tide of trouble.

## Notecard - Prohibition Against Role Playing In Other Communities

2008/10/22

Recently our rules and application have been amended to address some issues that we have been experiencing in the SIMs.

The new sections reads as follows:

AGREEMENT: We are providing you with rich and rewarding role play combat experience. We provide the sims, free clothes, free weapons, and manage and maintain all. By applying to our sims, you agree to follow our rules, make a positive contribution to role play, and IMPORTANTLY, agree to not join or participate in other groups or sims that have the same or similar Role Play as Anachronistic Lands. Currently that includes: All sims and groups from The Roman Empire Sims, Egypt Valley of the Gods, and The Ancient Roman World sims. If you are a member of those sims or groups you will be asked to leave them.

You are receiving this note because this change will effect you. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need more information about our new policies. I would be happy to answer any and all questions or concerns you might have.

On Saturday, October 25 these rules will be going into effect.

Thank you.

Seshemetka

Anachronistic Lands SIM Administrator/Membership

This announcement was not well received. Apart from the obvious resentment generated by being told what to do by a community centered on freedom and fun, most criticism centered around the fact that this was an entirely unenforceable rule. Like Linden Lab's similarly unenforceable rules about what one could and could not do with notecards of chats, and indeed all law attempting to regulate virtual spaces<sup>549</sup> this rule was roundly ignored. Horemheb responded by investigating each member. One's profile in Second Life could, optionally, display the groups of which one was a member. Horemheb started checking people's profiles to see which groups people were members of and then threatened to ban them from his community if they didn't leave those groups. Most members responded by simply unchecking the box that would display groups prohibited by Horemheb in their profile. Members of the community began informing on each other, advising Horemheb if they had seen each other participating in other communities. For many people this was the last straw and they simply left the community never to return.

Then Horemheb disappeared. Usually Horemheb was in the world for at least ten hours a day. When he hadn't been seen for an entire day and no one knew why, an unprecedented event, people started to wonder where he was. Then Seshemetka, his closest assistant, made a startling announcement. Horemheb, she said, was dead. That is, the meatspace person behind the avatar was dead. Shock reverberated through the community. A spontaneous gathering occurred at his palace. At first there was widespread disbelief that he was dead, a general preference to believe that he would be back. The uncertainty of not knowing about the person behind the avatar prevailed. But after Seshemetka told us all that she knew Horemheb in meatspace and she had confirmed he was really dead people started to leave mementos of Horemheb in the great hall as a memorial. There were a lot of people, certainly more than had ever been seen in the sims. There was a great outpouring of grief. The spontaneous memorial gathering in the palace went on for two days. Over two hundred avatars came and went in that time. More and more mementos and wreaths piled up.

There remained a contingent who thought his absence a staged ploy, I among them. We considered that either he had had enough of the turmoil in the community or else remained unconvinced of his meatspace death because of the phenomenon that often occurs in online communities wherein someone will say they are leaving, never to return, only to resurface shortly thereafter.

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549 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, p. 2, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

Those of us who had no contact with Horemheb other than in the community were least convinced that he was really dead. Seshemetka and a few others who said they had known with him via Skype or in person were the contingent most convinced of his death. If it is true that those who maintained the reality of his meatspace death did so because of verification via methods other than Second Life, then this is a powerful example of how the unknowing of online life prejudices our worldview, making us more skeptical until corroborating evidence is provided. I find this a healthy skepticism and a desirable tendency.

People eventually began to realise what Horemheb's absence meant for the community. Horemheb had been financially responsible for all the sims that made up the community and people started to wonder what would happen once the next payment was due. Seshemetka contacted Linden Lab and asked if they would transfer ownership of the sims to her. They declined, stating that their contract was with a named person and without that person's permission no such transfer could occur. Regardless of this Seshemetka started to raise funds to pay for the sims. Her method was to try to find enough paying members such that if they each committed to paying a set amount each month the entire amount necessary would be provided. She did succeed in finding enough contributors for her plan to work, I agreed to be one, but then she alienated most of them by treating them in the same way Horemheb had, i.e. as if she was the only person whose voice mattered and as if everyone should simply obey her. By failing to treat the new stakeholders with respect she drove most of them off. Predictably the community fell apart. Linden Lab simply deleted the sims once payment was overdue. Seshemetka tried to keep things together and obtained a single sim in which to keep the community going with the few members of the community she hadn't alienated. This sim continued on for a while until eventually being taken over by someone else and being turned into something completely different from Egypt.

Myself, Berenike and a group of about fifteen others (all of who were anti Gor) started a new sim and formed a new Egyptian community. I remain unable to write much about that second community as a key member withdrew consent very late in the study and it is hard to say much while honouring that request. That community was founded on the model where a group of members each pay a fixed amount toward sim rental. This situation became problematic later as it is not possible for more than one person to be the registered owner of a sim in Linden Lab's eyes.

Horemheb's death was to be a pivotal event for the sims as, although his funeral brought the community together, his death quickly led to the demise of the community. Many people remained skeptical about whether or not he had really died in meatspace or if he had staged his death in order to close down the community. Often people would leave and then come back as another avatar after a period of days or weeks, but it was always easy to spot who they were if one had had any reasonable amount of interaction with them. It is now nearly two years since his death and no one who knew Horemheb has seen him return to the world.



## 7. Conclusion

This thesis has argued that worlds such as Second Life are not games, but are rather environments that facilitate creation and sharing. Freedom and fun are the prime motivations for residents to create their own environments in this world. They seek to manifest a world of their ultimate creation, where there are no restrictions on their creative expression, and where they can participate in the fun economy.

While virtual worlds are attractive to residents for the perceived qualities of fun and freedom that they offer, fun and freedom are not always the result of participation in them. The same tension that exists between freedom and profit in the macrocosmic world of meatspace also exists, albeit to a lesser degree, in the microcosmic world of Second Life. As such virtual worlds are an accurate reflection of a society that purports to value fun and freedom but does not deliver them reliably.

The Second Life content creation tools lower the barrier to the creation of quality, complex content and residents enthusiastically embrace them. Ordinary residents massively outnumber professional developers of content, and are often happy to create content and give it away gratis, or to sell it much more cheaply than professional content developers do. This content is not always up to the same standard as professional content, though it is increasingly the case that it is. Most content creators are not trying to make a living from their productions and resent the imposition of the permissions system which they see as a non fun aspect of their Second Life experience, which only serves to make collaborative endeavours more difficult. The conflict of the freedom to create and the freedom to control one's creations is an exemplar of Dibble's<sup>550</sup> model wherein the spheres of work and play are melded. Profit is not the only motive for creation. Clearly models which address this continued intermingling of the spheres of work and play, both in and out of the world, need to be seriously considered.

I have elucidated the reasons why trying to control content permissions is not the best way to help residents benefit from their creations. The open source business models I have herein discussed, e.g. where creators encourage copying in order to overcome the problem of obscurity, where creators sell off the shelf items as a method of attracting orders for bespoke items and where items are given away as loss leaders, show how in an economy of free and easy copying of digital goods creators cannot rely on attempts to artificially replicate meatspace scarcity to help them benefit from their endeavors.

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550 Dibble, J., (2006), *Play Money: Or, How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot*, Basic Books, New York.

Rather, they should view the copying and exchange of their creations as an invaluable promotional tool and adjust to the reality of infinite, cost free replicability.

The fun economy conditions users to expect to be heard by those who control the online spaces they inhabit. This preconception of users is the reason Linden Lab was so reviled by residents for its failure to heed their requests. This will inevitably have an effect on the political structures of a meatspace world where millions of people have grown up immersed in an online world and where dissatisfaction is relieved by going somewhere else and making a new thing there, or by making one's own solution to problems having no redress otherwise. Change is already being seen. One example being the return of direct democracy to the West, after its absence since the suppression of Athenian democracy by the Macedonians in 322 BCE. While Switzerland has used a form of semi direct democracy since its 1848 constitution, true direct democracy is only now being experimented with in the rest of the Western world in the form of Electronic Democracy<sup>551</sup>.

Here in Australia the newly formed Pirate Party, a political party populated by technologically aware, particularly internet savvy citizens, who are overwhelmingly under 40, uses electronic democracy for all decisions, stating in its constitution "Policy development should occur with the maximum possible interaction with the party members - the party should engage in as a participatory process as is possible, and outcomes should be reached through consensus<sup>552</sup>. Overseas, the German Pirate Party, which had some electoral success<sup>553</sup> before encountering setbacks due to scandals, utilizes LiquidFeedback, open source software which facilitates proposition development and decision making<sup>554</sup>. Whether this kind of democracy will continue to grow remains to be seen. Based on my experiences in communities in cyberspace I suggest it will, due to the high level of dissatisfaction and disengagement with meatspace politics, combined with the general presumption of individual rights and democracy exhibited by residents of virtual worlds. However I see the most likely political philosophy to expand into meatspace from those habituated to having to seek their own solutions to the problems of online life is some form of anarchy.

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551 Clift, S., (2006), *Steven Clift's E-Democracy Resource Links*, <http://www.publicus.net/articles/edemresources.html>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

552 Pirate Party Australia, (2014), *Party Constitution*, <http://pirateparty.org.au/constitution/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

553 Wikipedia, *Pirate Party Germany*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piratenpartei\\_Deutschland#Election\\_results](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piratenpartei_Deutschland#Election_results), Accessed 08/02/2014.

554 Public Software Group, *LiquidFeedback*, <http://liquidfeedback.org/>, Accessed 08/02/2014.

Virtual worlds (along with most online life) exist in a state of anarchy, where residents most commonly resort to self help solutions to resolve problems<sup>555</sup>. This is particularly the case in Second Life because Linden Lab refuse to take any role in mediating disputes between residents, instead preferring to rely on nation state legal solutions such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), which, in addition to only applying to the United States, has been widely abused<sup>556</sup>.

The reason for this anarchy may seem ironic. The unrestrained communication provided to us by the internet is allowing us to see that we are all part of a greater whole. Never before in human history have so many made such intimate contact with so many others. In the communities I studied, on a minute by minute basis, people were living virtually beside other residents who were physically located in far removed places around the globe. This made us much more aware of the cultures of the places our fellow community members inhabited in meatspace. One example of this is that whenever the subject of which meatspace time zone one was in came up people in the United States would invariably give their zone as, for example, 'Eastern'. I would then remark that I was also in 'Eastern'. Further enquiries as to my location invariably produced much confusion. Eventually, after long exposure to an Australian, they realised that other countries also had time zones that contained 'Eastern' in their name. This was accompanied by an increase in their knowledge of the geography and culture of countries other than their own.

This kind of virtual cohabitation is only one exemplar of the process whereby formerly discrete cultures are combining at a much accelerated rate. Events happening in meatspace that are physically far distant from us have a much greater resonance for us when we deal daily with persons living in those meatspace locales. We might well be intimately acquainted with people living through the revolutions and wars of our time, to which we would not otherwise be exposed on such an affecting level, having to rely for information of such events to be conveyed to us by an increasingly corrupt and inept fourth estate. This intimate information provision is filling the gap left vacant by the absence of an efficient, unbiased media.

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555 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>. Accessed 31/01/2014.

556 Seng, D., (2014), "The State of the Discordant Union: An Empirical Analysis of DMCA Takedown Notices", *Virginia Journal of Law and Technology, Forthcoming*, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2411915](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2411915). Accessed 20/03/2014.

The result of this peer to peer information sharing is that it is harder to obfuscate political realities and easier for individuals to connect and mobilise. The kind of hold over the mediascape that individuals such as Rupert Murdoch now have is diminishing daily. Centralised control of information is becoming less and less possible<sup>557</sup> a process exemplified by the rapid growth of OpenSimulator while Second Life declines. Despite the arguments of authors such as Lessig<sup>558</sup> and Zittrain<sup>559</sup> that we are heading towards a permission culture, where choice is reduced and shiny, locked down devices proliferate in an overly proprietary nightmare, I remain optimistic. The relentless force that will save us from this future is the human desire to create and explore.

In order to make the best quality remix possible, to create the best quality culture possible, access to the best quality information is required. The development of the internet is having a democratising effect on information access and reissue, by removing the expense of publishing, and extending the reach of the individual so much that it is now possible to wonder if publishers are even still relevant<sup>560</sup>. However it is still difficult for a non academic, like Cleopatra, to access the most accurate and detailed information. This is because this democratization process is being challenged by publishing companies who are seeking to obfuscate the output of academics through restrictive copyright requirements for journal articles and academic books, and by making them so expensive that even universities are going broke trying to pay for books and journal subscriptions<sup>561 562 563 564</sup> so they can get access to the work produced by their own academics. They are being forced to pay twice, once in the form of salaries for academics and again when they pay to buy back access to the works of those academics<sup>565</sup>. Indeed this

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557 Michael, G. J., (2012), *Anarchy and Property Rights in the Virtual World: How Disruptive Technologies Undermine the State and Ensure that the Virtual World Remains a "Wild West"*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2233374>, Accessed 31/01/2014.

558 Lessig, L., *Code, Version 2.0*, <http://codev2.cc/>, Accessed 02/04/2014.

559 Zittrain, J., (2008), *The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It*, [http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4455262/Zittrain\\_Future%20of%20the%20Internet.pdf](http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4455262/Zittrain_Future%20of%20the%20Internet.pdf), Accessed 02/04/2014.

560 Coker, M., (2009), *Do Authors Still Need Publishers?*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-coker/do-authors-still-need-pub\\_b\\_334539.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-coker/do-authors-still-need-pub_b_334539.html), Accessed 02/04/2014.

561 Kingsley, D., (2012), "Ownership and copyright of scholarly works", *Intelligent Information Symposium 2012*, [http://intelligentinfo.com.au/sb\\_clients/intelligentinfo/docs/2012-Danny-Kingsley-Ownership-and-copyright-of-scholarly-works.pdf](http://intelligentinfo.com.au/sb_clients/intelligentinfo/docs/2012-Danny-Kingsley-Ownership-and-copyright-of-scholarly-works.pdf), Accessed 09/02/2014.

562 University of Washington, (2010), *University Libraries reduces journal subscriptions and book orders; budget cuts affect online as well as print materials*, [http://www.lib.washington.edu/about/news/announcements/journal\\_subscriptions](http://www.lib.washington.edu/about/news/announcements/journal_subscriptions), Accessed 09/02/2014.

563 Sample, I., (2012), *Harvard University says it can't afford journal publishers' prices*, <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/apr/24/harvard-university-journal-publishers-prices>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

564 Dyer, O., (2004), *US universities threaten to cancel subscriptions to Elsevier journals*, <http://www.bmj.com/content/328/7439/543.1>, Accessed 09/02/2014.

565 Divisekera, U., Dunn, A. G., *Why science doesn't belong to everyone (yet)*, <http://www.crikey.com.au/2013/02/11/why-science-doesnt-belong-to-everyone-yet/>, Accessed 09/02/2014.



phenomenon has become so damaging for universities that some are now refusing to pay the exorbitant prices demanded by academic publishers and are turning instead to open access publishing or starting their own open access archives, like arXiv at Cornell University which has nearly a million articles<sup>566 567</sup>. Academics, among them myself and the other members of the Egyptian community who were academics, are agitating for change, as evidenced by the Cost of Knowledge website where nearly fourteen thousand academics have pledged to not support Elsevier journals because of their business practices<sup>568</sup>.

The entertainment industry is also a challenger to this democratization process and to remix culture. The advent of instant, perfect, copying and remixing is a threat to their business model and so they seek to curtail it. This is seen in Second Life by their closing down of those themed sims they could find. The very corporations who today seek to restrict access to ideas and stories have made a fortune by remixing information in the public domain, but now seek to declare ownership of those stories and prevent others from doing the same. An example of this is Disney, who has profited from stories in the public domain<sup>569</sup> but who now seek to tightly control the copying of these stories. Their most famous icon, Mickey Mouse, made his debut in a remix of an earlier film, Buster Keaton's Steamboat Bill. Now Disney are seeking to prevent others from doing as they have done<sup>570</sup>, to build new cultural elements from the stories previously told. Fortunately the internet is now so vast, and the number of users so high, that it is impossible for such corporate control to be realised in any meaningful way short of the imposition of the Orwellian nightmare. If Heidegger is right, if the best thing about humans is that we have the capacity to open new worlds, then unless we do everything we can to make the best worlds we can we are failing to be the best we can be. Such a failure may be terminal.

Telling the stories of other times and places helps us to learn from them in a way that simply learning facts about them doesn't. However, because of the great distance in time between us and the ancient Egyptians, I don't believe we can understand them as they understood themselves. We have been able to study their language in a meaningful way since the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799, yet in just over two hundred years we still haven't properly learnt how they pronounced vowels. But if we can combine our propensity for

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566 Cornell University Library, *arXiv.org*, <http://arxiv.org/>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

567 Harvard University, (2012), *Faculty Advisory Council Memorandum on Journal Pricing*, <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k77982&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup143448>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

568 Neylon, T., *The Cost of Knowledge*, <http://thecostofknowledge.com/>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

569 Khanna, D., (2014), *50 Disney Movies Based On The Public Domain*, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/derekkhanna/2014/02/03/50-disney-movies-based-on-the-public-domain/>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

570 Masnick, M., (2012), *Disney Claims House Of Mouse Built With Copyright, Ignores Public Domain Foundation*, <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20120910/02485220325/disney-claims-house-mouse-built-with-copyright-ignores-public-domain-foundation.shtml>. Accessed 09/02/2014.

story telling with the immersive experience of living an ancient culture we have a much greater capacity to walk in another's shoes. But the unknowing remains. In an age where instant access to information proliferates, where one can look up facts more easily than at any time in history, there is a new kind of unknowing. On the internet no one knows you are a dog. We know we don't know who the other is on the internet, we know wikipedia might be wrong, we know anything we find on the net must be questioned for veracity. Many educators prohibit their students from using wikipedia, citing its lack of veracity, but I suggest this known falsity, although actually massively overstated<sup>571</sup>, makes us wiser. If we proceed on the basis that all knowledge must be questioned surely we are better positioned to discover truth?

My journey into this virtual world was one of discovery and learning. My strong natural inclination to read and research pushed me further and further into the world of the ancient Egyptians. Possibly further than you the reader might have liked to be drawn into the intricate details of ancient rituals. However this shows the potential of virtual worlds for education. I was drawn into the world of the ancient Egyptians by role play. Experiences rather than exposure to facts excited my enquiries, though I often found myself wishing for some face to face guidance from an expert. This was echoed by the desire of members of the community to have the heiroglyph game be a guided experience.

In other research I have shown that the best results from teaching in Second Life result from a combination of face to face and virtual teaching<sup>572</sup>. This has likewise been found by other authors<sup>573 574</sup>. It has also been found to hold for other virtual worlds<sup>575</sup> and for other forms of online instruction<sup>576</sup>. Most

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571 Wikimedia Foundation, (2012), *Seven years after Nature, pilot study compares Wikipedia favorably to other encyclopedias in three languages*, <http://blog.wikimedia.org/2012/08/02/seven-years-after-nature-pilot-study-compares-wikipedia-favorably-to-other-encyclopedias-in-three-languages/>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

572 Elwell, M., Cook, S., Leigh, M., Terrillon, J., (2009), "Shared Virtual Environment Complimenting Task Achievement Training", in *Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Computers in Education*, Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education, Hong Kong.

573 Wang, Y., Braman, J., (2009), "Extending the Classroom through Second Life", *Journal of Information Systems Education*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 235-247.

574 Sanchez, J., (2009), "Pedagogical Applications of Second Life", *Library Technology Reports*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 21-29.

575 Hew, K. F., Cheung, W. S., (2010), "Use of three-dimensional (3-D) immersive virtual worlds in K-12 and higher education settings: A review of the research", *British Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 33-35.

576 Lester, P.M., Ling, C., M., (2009), "Analog vs. Digital Instruction and Learning", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 457-483.

teaching in Second Life utilises a mixture of face to face and virtual engagement<sup>577</sup>, but some use fully immersive teaching utilising role play<sup>578</sup>, though the latter are certainly in the minority.

Meatspace and the virtual seem to be two worlds because we presently have to do one or the other at a time. If I am walking around in the world I must be utilising a computer to do so. I cannot be simultaneously walking around in the meatspace world. This will not long be the case. Once we are accessing virtual worlds in a way that augments our meatspace world we will be able to do both at once, and indeed the one will be able to interact with the other. If, instead of being tied to a bulky desktop computer I had been able to use augmented reality<sup>579</sup> to interact in the world, it would have been an entirely difference experience, the two perceived worlds would have become one. This kind of interaction is already happening to a limited degree with smartphones, and to a more advanced degree with the aid of technologies such as the Oculus Rift<sup>580</sup> and the Virtuix Omni<sup>581</sup>, but much more immersive, seamlessly interactive augmented reality wearable systems will remove this perceptual dividing line completely.

The perception that virtual worlds are somehow not real will not persist. When technologies are new they seem strange, foreign and unreal<sup>582</sup>, for instance, McLuhan<sup>583</sup> notes that in the early days of the telephone the word 'phoney' was used to mean the lack of real substance inherent in a telephone conversation, that there was something considered unreal about telephonic communications on account of the lack of the physical presence of the persons so conversing or the lack of a physical substrate to the message. Likewise in the present day interactions in virtual worlds are often derided as unreal. This will pass over time as these technologies become more familiar and more widely used and we integrate them into our lives.

How we will deal with issues of identity in cyberspace is altogether another question. Will corporations continue their push to get us to use our 'real' names online, or will more separatist conceptions prevail? The events in the community show the difficulty of maintaining separation from one's online

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577 Hew, K. F., Cheung, W. S., (2010), "Use of three-dimensional (3-D) immersive virtual worlds in K-12 and higher education settings: A review of the research", *British Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 33-35.

578 Bogdanovych, A., Rodriguez-Aguilar, S., Cohen, S.A., (2010), "Authentic Interactive Reenactment Of Cultural Heritage", *Applied Artificial Intelligence*, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp 617-647.

579 Augmented reality is where technology is utilized to augment or overlay information on the meatspace world in order to make for a richer experience. For example information about a location can be provided on a user's smartphone when they arrive there.

580 Oculus VR, *Oculus Rift*, <http://www.oculusvr.com/>, Accessed 10/02/2014.

581 Atwell, C., (2013), *Virtuix Omni allows gamers to move freely in the virtual world*, <http://www.element14.com/community/community/news/blog/2013/03/21/virtuix-omni-allows-gamers-to-move-freely-in-the-virtual-world>, Accessed 10/02/2014.

582 Marvin, C., (1988), *When Old Technologies Were New*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

583 McLuhan, M., (1994), *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 265.

self. It is one's self, but it is not. Even those of us who set out to maintain a distinct separation between our avatars, the characters those avatars play, and our meatspace selves, find that despite our best efforts, from time to time, we fail and enter an integralist reality. But though I was immersed in my avatar's experience at times, I don't think that the avatar is my primary self. I still prioritise my meatspace self. But would this still be true if I was spending as much time in the virtual as I do in meatspace? If I could park my meat body somewhere and have my consciousness totally enter cyberspace?

We cannot, at this time, immerse ourselves so fully into virtual space that we might nullify our meatspace perception. However such a exigency is already being worked towards<sup>584</sup>, and if the plans of those who wish to upload their consciousness come to pass, then this would be the only sure method of discerning if sacred space exists in virtual space, meatspace or astral space, or perhaps simultaneously in all three. Until the day comes, and I am certain it will, when we can unplug from our meatspace bodies' sensoria completely, meatspace is where our perceptions remain focused. Meatspace remains our real reality. But not for long.

Do others care about who we 'really' are when they have made our acquaintance in cyberspace? This seems to depend on the type of relationship one has with them. The more personal the relationship the greater the concern. Certainly the media has reported on a host of cases where relationships in Second Life have resulted in meatspace divorces<sup>585 586 587 588</sup>. I did see this in action, I knew an inworld couple whose relationship resulted in meatspace marital upheaval when it was discovered by the partner of one party. There seems an odd disconnect here in that those persons who partake in these kind of relationships are often advocates for the reality of Second Life, while at the same time insisting their meatspace spouse won't mind about their inworld romance.

My own experience was with much less intimate relationships, though it had serious consequences in the community. Much of Cleopatra's unhappiness with my character revolved around her assertions that he was a misogynist who actively plotted to reduce female participation in the priesthood and the

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584 Kurzweil, R., (2005), *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, Penguin Books, New York.

585 MailOnline, (2008), *Revealed: The 'other woman' in Second Life divorce... who's now engaged to the web cheat she's never met*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1085412/Revealed-The-woman-Second-Life-divorce--whos-engaged-web-cheat-shes-met.html>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

586 Morris, S., (2008), *Second Life affair leads to real life divorce*, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/nov/13/second-life-divorce>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

587 Edwards, R., (2008), *Woman divorces husband for having a 'virtual' affair on Second Life*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/3453273/Woman-divorces-husband-for-having-a-virtual-affair-on-Second-Life.html>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

588 News.com.au, (2008), *David Pollard's Second Life affair leads to divorce from Amy Taylor*, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/virtual-reality-affair-ends-in-real-divorce/story-e6frfnr-1111118043466>. Accessed 02/04/2014.

community in general. The thing the cloud of unknowing hid from her, and from you, was that my male avatar has a female behind him in meatspace. I have spent quite some time wondering about how events would have played out if I had had a female avatar. Would Cleopatra and I still have had a falling out? Would my relationship with other members of the community have been different?

I had had a male avatar for two and a half years and no one had guessed that he had a secret female inner self. I am not arguing that my character couldn't possibly have been a misogynist simply because my meatspace body is female. I could have chosen to play a woman hater, but I didn't. Moreover, the failure of my ability to maintain a separatist position at all times indicates that my meatspace self comes through into the avatar even if I try for it not to. Had I chosen to play a misogynist, in extremis my meatspace self's lack of misogyny would have come through into the character when I became one with him.

After the collapse of the first community I came out to those I started the second community with. Their reactions did vary, but none of them were bothered by it. Some expressed extreme surprise, some admiration for my being able to effect this mirage for so long, and some were ambivalent, remarking that that kind of thing certainly happened all the time, although much more frequently with meatspace males having female avatars. I am certain that if I had maintained an intimate relationship with any of them, the reactions would have been amplified. I continued my relationships with them in the second community in more or less the same way as I had in the first. In time some forgot again, and when I later had occasion to meet them in a female avatar and made myself known to them, they would remark that they had forgotten, the power of appearances taking precedence. One remarked to me that he couldn't conceive of me as a woman and was just going to keep thinking of me as a man.

For me the experience of being a man for so many hours a day for such a long period was a sustained examination of the nature of my self. Being as I have spent a majority of my working life in male dominated occupations it was not difficult for me to pass as male. My personality has been informed by those long years cohabiting with men so closely, though I am sure it is also the case that my personality was such to start with that I was suited to male company. I am not a girly girl. In fact that was the reason I chose to be a male to start with. When I first entered the world I had created a female avatar. But as I began to customise her I found that the majority of female accoutrements in the world were not to my taste. Animation overrides were always sold as either male or female. I quickly found the female AOs to be invariably overly sexualised. I just didn't walk like that and I didn't want my avatar to do so either. Some of the male AOs had masculine traits that I didn't think perfectly suitable to a female avatar, but none of them were as obviously sexualised as the female ones. The solution I settled on was to select a male avatar and the

least overtly masculine AO I could find. It was the least sexualised option. Perhaps this also explains why I hadn't felt the need to obtain genitals for my avatar.

My being a man for my time in the world added another level of creation to my role play. I was a meatspace woman playing at being a male avatar playing at being a male character. Even when I was in other parts of the world than the Egyptian community I was still playing a role. It was a role that was a remix based on information I had about how males behaved. Fortunately for me no one is trying to lock up information about what males are like behind paywalls in the same way they are for much other information. If that had been the case my portrayal of a male would have been less convincing. As it was I was able to successfully use the widely available information about being male to participate in a community and help to create culture. I was also making a new me, a me that included the lived experience of being a male.

As I have shown in my discussions of how residents remix to make new meaning, virtual worlds are at the forefront of culture creation. They enable us to create and immerse ourselves in new ways of living. Virtual worlds are test beds for new forms of societies, new forms of being. The immersive and multimedia nature of virtual worlds, and the sheer amount of time people spend being in the world, hasten the remix and allow individuals to create their own meaning and then live it. But caution is necessary if we are not to fall victim to believing our own propaganda. However I am not challenging the validity of this process of remixing fact and fiction, nor its outcome. It is more that I am arguing for truth in advertising. Subjectivity is not objectivity. As only an omniscient being can have objectivity we must admit that we are in fact creatures of subjectivity. Only in the omniscience of apotheosis could we have objectivity, and once we had it we would be excluded from subjective experience.

Anything we learn is a construction of our own subjective reality tunnel. But, the more I found out about ancient Egyptian religion the more it was in sync with my own religious ideas. For example, the divine in all things. In ancient Egypt, first kings, and then all humans are considered sons and daughters of the gods, "they are his images and come from his person"<sup>589</sup>. The physical world was also of the divine essence, "The Creator's description of this in the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus (18, 21-22) ... is that he 'broadened out' (*wsh*) in the world and became being (*hprw*) itself"<sup>590</sup>. This is the exact opposite of the Jewish concept of *tzimtzum*, whereby Jehovah removes himself from a space in order to create the more finite human world<sup>591</sup>. The presence of divinity in the natural world and in humans in ancient Egyptian thought is in stark contrast with the status of both in the Abrahamic religions. Moreover in ancient

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589 Karenga, M., (2006), *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, University of Sankore Press, Los Angeles, pp. 216-230.

590 Karenga, M., (2006), *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, University of Sankore Press, Los Angeles, p. 220.

591 Scholem, G., (1946), *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York, p. 260.

Egyptian thought humans were perfectible creatures who could achieve assimilation with the divine. It has always been my experience that both the natural world and humans are divine things. If this is the case then surely there is no reason why the divine would not be found in cyberspace.

The experience of my avatar's initiation ritual certainly removed for me any doubt about the possibility of the generation of the perception of sacred space in cyberspace. Although I remain uncertain as to the exact locus of the sacred space in question, it was undoubtedly present. In my initiation ritual, while in the state of flow, where meatspace perceptions faded and I seemed to be in the world completely, virtual space became sacred space. That this perception continued on once my senses reasserted the primacy of meatspace, and to such a degree that I had felt compelled to close the ritual there as well, seems to indicate that the sacred space exists wherever one's perception is focused. Because we don't know how to objectively measure such a thing as sacred space, it is impossible to say if it was 'really' present in either cyberspace or meatspace. But I can report that the perception of it was present in both spaces. It was found where my consciousness was focused.

If we admit of a divine spark in mankind perhaps it is that we are divinity made manifest without objectivity. We have forgotten it, perhaps on purpose. Perhaps we are manifest for the purpose of experiencing subjectivity. The nature of the universe supports this supposition. The manifest universe can be characterized by a single thing. That thing is change. Atoms move, energy flows, perceptions happen. We know things exist because we notice changes. Our perceptual system is drawn to changes. When we look at a scene our vision centers on the area of highest contrast or the most movement. If there is but a single tone in a scene we cannot discern anything but a flat field of colour. To have no change is to have stasis. Omniscience is stasis. To be omniscient is to always know everything. To know everything that is or will be. For such a being there can be nothing new, no change. There is only stasis, boredom. For change to be possible there must be the capacity to do or know or be a new thing. Thus the universe could not exist without subjectivity. We each come to our own personal understanding of being as we create our own remix. From the ontological point of view of the ancient Egyptians, and myself, all things are part of the one divine totality of being. Cyberspace is real and divine in the same panentheistic way that meatspace is.





# Appendix

This study was approved by the University of Queensland Behavioural and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee and assigned approval number 2009001216. Below are the participant information sheet and consent forms for both sim owners and individual participants. Note that the title of the project was originally "Real Magic?: Ancient Egyptian Pagan Religions in Second Life" but was later changed to "Virtually Real:Being in Cyberspace".

## Information Sheet

### Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: Real Magic?: Ancient Egyptian Pagan Religions in Second Life

Paganism is essentially an experiential religion. The purpose of this study is to investigate Pagan religious practice in Second Life. I will survey what kind of Pagan religious activity is being undertaken in Second Life, focusing on Ancient Egyptian Religions, and examine how a religion centred on the importance of practice can be experienced in a virtual world, where experience is mediated by the technology used to access that virtual world. I will also be investigating participant's attitudes toward their religious practice in Second Life as well as how practice in Second Life fits in with real world practice. The study will run for three years.

The research will be conducted on a participant observer basis and may be supplemented with short interviews not exceeding fifteen minutes in duration. Participant observer means that the researcher will participate in Pagan and magical communities and groups in Second Life in the same way as any other member or visitor to those communities or groups would do. Because recorded consent has been obtained from the owner of this sim for approval for research to be undertaken in their sim you may be subject to passive observation of unlimited extent and duration without individual consent being obtained. You may also be invited to engage in voluntary virtual face to face interaction and/or interviews with the researcher, for which individual consent will be obtained.

There are no known risks of participating in this project. Data from each participant will be kept and stored securely; all material will be treated in a strictly confidential manner as far as the law allows. Data from this study may be presented at professional conferences, and/or published in professional journals. All avatars will be identified by pseudonyms and identifying information will be changed to ensure participant anonymity. When providing you with this information sheet the researcher will ask you for your consent to participate in this study. Your reply will be recorded and kept as a record of your consent.

Consent has been obtained from the owner of this sim. Participant consent is required prior to the commencement of dialogue and interviews. The investigator will provide you with a consent notecard. Once you have read it please confirm that you have read this information sheet as well as the consent notecard, and that you give your consent, in an instant message or text chat directly to the avatar Thutmose who will keep a record of it.

The principal researcher for this study is Morgan Leigh who is a PhD candidate in the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics. Mrs Leigh has been a member of Second Life for two years. Residents can contact Morgan Leigh inworld (via the avatar Thutmose) or by email at any time to request feedback. At the completion of the research, Morgan Leigh will make a summary available to any respondents who indicate they are interested in receiving one.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary - all participants are free to withdraw from participation in this project at any time without penalty. In the event that you choose to withdraw be aware that, because of the communal nature of this project, your data will be retained but no information relating specifically to you will be used. Please consider this carefully before giving your consent. Should you choose to withdraw you may do so by contacting Morgan Leigh at s4161097@uq.edu.au at any time. Morgan Leigh will email you in reply to acknowledge receipt of your withdrawal.

This study has been cleared by one of the human ethics committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are, of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with project staff (Morgan Leigh is contactable on +61 412 400 890, by e-mail at s4161097@uq.edu.au or inworld by messaging the researcher's avatar Thutmose). If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on +61 7 3365 3924.

You may download a copy of this information sheet from <http://www.ooze.net/pub/information-sheet>

Thank you for your interest and, hopefully, your participation in this project.

Morgan Leigh

## Consent Notecard - Sim owner

Consent Notecard - Sim owner(s)

Project title: "Real Magic?: Ancient Egyptian Pagan Religious Practice in Second Life".

Thutmose is the avatar of Morgan Leigh a PhD candidate at the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics at the University of Queensland and is conducting research in this sim.

Morgan Leigh wishes to obtain your approval to undertake research in your sim ..... (insert sim name here) You will be notified once the research is completed.

Consent is required as your avatar, not as your self. Morgan Leigh undertakes to comply with all conditions and assurances set out in the information sheet. Once you have given your permission for research to be undertaken in your sim individual consent will not be sought before observation is undertaken.

The results of the research will be made available to all participants once the research is completed.

Please refer immediately to <http://www.ooze.net/pub/information-sheet> before proceeding.

You agree that:

I am the owner or part owner of the ..... (insert sim name here) sim.

I agree to allow Morgan Leigh to undertake research in my sim which will involve participant observation and/or interviews. Individual consent will be sought from each avatar involved.

I agree to allow Morgan Leigh to post a notice in my sim to advise residents about her research.

I have read the research information sheet pertaining to this research project and understand the nature of the research and my role in it.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I am free to withdraw permission for research to proceed on this project at any time without penalty.

I understand that, as Linden Lab advises in their Privacy Policy, "You may choose to disclose personal information in our online forums, via your Second Life profile, directly to other users in chat or otherwise while using the Second Life service. Please be aware that such information is public information and you should not expect privacy or confidentiality in these settings". The Linden Lab privacy policy can be found at <http://secondlife.com/corporate/privacy.php>.

Further, I understand that my data will be kept and stored securely and that all material will be treated in a strictly confidential manner as far as the law allows.

Once you have read and understood this notecard and the information sheet please confirm that you give your consent in an instant message or text chat directly to the avatar Thutmose who will keep a record of it.

# Consent Notecard - Participant Observer

Consent Notecard - Participant Observation.

Project title: "Real Magic?: Ancient Egyptian Pagan Religious Practice in Second Life".

Thutmose is the avatar of Morgan Leigh a PhD candidate at the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics at the University of Queensland and is conducting research in this sim.

Morgan Leigh has obtained permission from (Name to be inserted here) the owner(s) of this sim to undertake this research.

The results of the research will be made available to all participants once the research is completed.

Please refer immediately to <http://www.ooze.net/pub/information-sheet> before proceeding.

You agree that:

I hereby agree to be involved in the above research project as a respondent. I have read the research information sheet pertaining to this research project and understand the nature of the research and my role in it.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from participation in this project at any time without penalty.

I understand that, as Linden Lab advises in their Privacy Policy, "You may choose to disclose personal information in our online forums, via your Second Life profile, directly to other users in chat or otherwise while using the Second Life service. Please be aware that such information is public information and you should not expect privacy or confidentiality in these settings". The Linden Lab privacy policy can be found at <http://secondlife.com/corporate/privacy.php>.

Further, I understand that my data will be kept and stored securely and that all material will be treated in a strictly confidential manner as far as the law allows.

Once you have read and understood this notecard and the information sheet please confirm that you give your consent in an instant message or text chat directly to the avatar Thutmose who will keep a record of it.

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